

MONEY, KIMBERLY W., Ed.D. The Experiences of English Language Learners with Disabilities: A Case Study Analysis. (2010)  
Directed by Dr. Rick Reitzug. 129 pp.

The purpose of this research was to analyze the experiences of students who are English Language Learners with disabilities in public schools. Research Methodology consisted of an in-depth case study analysis of two students of Hispanic descent who attend a rural elementary school in North Carolina. All former teachers of the two students and their parents were interviewed as a part of this qualitative research study.

Results of the study showed that teachers overall concur that they have not received appropriate or adequate training on how to meet the needs of students learning English as a Second Language; therefore, they lacked knowledge about how to distinguish a language barrier from a disability. The data also revealed that teachers agreed that a more proactive, preventive approach needs to be employed in order to fully meet the needs of students who are learning English as a Second Language and are students with disabilities. Teachers must be taught how to understand cultural and linguistic diversity in addition to how to distinguish key features of a learning disability.

Other significant results consisted of the vital importance of parental involvement opportunities for bilingual parents. Findings from this study support that bilingual parents are operating in a survival mode and supporting their children to the best of their knowledge but need additional support and teaching so that they understand how to support the education of their child in first and/or second language at home.

THE EXPERIENCES OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS WITH DISABILITIES:  
A CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to  
The Faculty of The Graduate School at  
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education

Greensboro

2010

Approved by

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Committee Chair

To my father, Dr. James W. White, whose memory I honor with the writing of this dissertation. It is because of his example that I am who I am today personally and professionally.

## APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of  
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express appreciation to Dr. Rick Reitzug, my committee chair and advisor, whose instruction and guidance through this program of study has been superb. I also wish to thank the joint efforts and continued support of Drs. Carl Lashley, Misti Williams, and Larry Coble. Their guidance and personal concern for the struggles of each student is greatly appreciated. Without their help and encouragement this dissertation would not have been possible.

A special thanks is due to my husband, Danny, and daughter, Kaylee, who have loved and supported me through my studies. These studies have deprived them of my attention and time, but through it all they have been very supportive. I want to especially thank my mother, Linda, whose love and patience has been a tremendous source of strength and encouragement.

Above all, I thank God for leading me to UNCG to pursue my doctorate. It has been an academically challenging, yet thoroughly rewarding experience.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Meeting the needs of English Language Learners is a very rewarding, yet complex task. Students who are learning English as a second language come to the United States for many different reasons, many of whom come from impoverished settings and who are refugees desiring a better life for themselves and their families. According to Federal guidelines derived from the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974, public schools are required to educate all students regardless of differences, and must work together to provide for them an equal educational opportunity. Each student learning English, possess differences in language aptitude, learning styles, culture, language acquisition, and personality. All of the aforementioned factors (or any combination of the factors) can potentially impact the students' learning and rate of progress.

The manner in which English Language Learners acquire second language, including their academic and linguistic struggles, has interested me for many years as an English as a Second Language teacher. In my teaching experience I have witnessed many students struggling to learn English while also struggling to learn academic content with little support in the regular classroom. This lack of support and understanding eventually led to teacher and student frustration. Teachers often referred students with English as a second language to special education teams primarily because they had

exhausted all possible strategies that they knew to use that would improve their students' overall progress. It is out of the witnessing of this frustration that I became an advocate for students learning English as second language. I could understand first hand their feelings of frustration and also the feelings of frustration from their teachers.

My passion and empathy for students struggling to learn English exists partly because of my own cross-cultural childhood experience of living in Ecuador, South America. I lived there for four years as a young child, with my parents, and remember vividly what it feels like to attend school in a setting that is foreign. It can be a very exhausting experience, but also very exciting, if students are given the proper support system (i.e. material and human resources) and a positive, inviting, learning environment.

In the following sections I will describe the plan I used to research the cases of two individual students learning English as a second language who also have demonstrated academic struggles to the point that they have been referred for special education services. One student, Franco, is a fifth year English Language Learner who is identified as having a learning disability in Reading. The other participant is a fifth year English Language Learners who is identified as Visually Impaired. These students were not identified as being students with disabilities until their fifth year in U.S. schools.

This research is significant to me personally because I believe that these two students represent typical English Language Learners who struggle due to complex factors but who deserve an equal education regardless of their language difference or potential learning disability. I have taught these two students as an ESL teacher and supported their language development also as a lead teacher. Now as an administrator, I

understand both the frustration of the regular education teacher, and the English Language teacher as these children struggle to achieve proficient scores on standardized End of Grade testing.

At the heart of this issue is a strong moral, ethical and legal obligation to meet all children where they are and work collaboratively to advance their learning. As students learning English as a second language frequently do not have a voice in their education, it is my desire to be their voice of equity, justice, and reason in creating a learning environment where they will receive the support structure needed to succeed.

### **Problem Statement**

The influx of students learning English as a second language has been tremendous in the United States and in North Carolina throughout the past decade. We know from the literature that North Carolina experienced a 317.7% growth in English language learners from 1995 to 2005 (ELL fact sheet, n.d., p. 2). The majority of these immigrant students speak Spanish as their native language. Three-fourths of the U.S. ELL population is Latino, Spanish-speaking students. Overall, there are approximately three million students learning English as a Second Language attending U.S. schools (Artiles & Klingner, 2006). Future projections indicate that one in four school-age students will be Latino/a by the year 2020, whereas only one in ten were Latino/a in 1982 (Gersten, Baker, Marks, & Smith, 2009).

Many new immigrants and their families reside in urban areas, but statistics have shown an influx in rural areas as well. For example, research has shown that in Chatham County, North Carolina (Siler City), 75% of new students are students learning English

as a second language. This sudden influx of new immigrants has impacted the schools because they have had to hire many bilingual staff members and additional ESL resources to meet the growing needs of the students learning English as a second language. In short, the culture of the school has changed along with the demographics. As the population continues to change, U.S. schools must also change in order to meet the growing needs of students learning English as a second language.

When reviewing the research there are many studies and facts about newly arrived immigrants and students learning English as a second language, but sufficient studies have not been done concerning students who are learning English who also may possess a disability. The point at which this intersection occurs, and the students' perceptions of this process, is a topic that has not been researched extensively. In addition, the individual stories of students learning English as a second language who also struggle with a disability very rarely get explored and shared with educators.

Many studies have been done that point to best practices for teaching students who are learning English as a Second Language who struggle academically. There are many strategies that come from research that are very similar to teaching both English Language Learners and Students with Disabilities (i.e. early intervention, authentic assessment, sheltered vocabulary). The primary void in the research about students learning English as a Second Language is students' and families' perceptions of the educational experiences that students encounter as they learn English in American Schools and how they overcome their struggles, including learning disabilities. Students'

feelings about their own educational experiences are important because they possess the power to increase or decrease motivation for learning.

In the following study, I investigated the many factors that have affected the progress of two students learning English and their journeys as students with disabilities. I analyzed their own opinions and perceptions of their educational experiences as well as their teachers' and parents' opinions of their experiences. With the assistance of the parents I also investigated how outside experiences have contributed to their educational experiences and rate of success. I analyzed and suggested specific strategies to assist teachers in understanding when to refer an English Language Learner for special education services and how to advocate for their appropriate placement according to research and best practice.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

English Language Learners make up a population of students from many different language and cultural groups. With each different culture come many different academic experiences and needs. For example, an ELL student from Asia who comes to the U.S. with a strong academic background and English language background may not need the academic support system equal to that of a student from a primitive village in Central America with no prior schooling experience. Educators must view students individually to ensure that their plans of study are appropriate and equitable. “Students with learning disabilities are a heterogeneous group, and no general or single intervention can be recommended for these students” (Swanson, 2003, p. 5). Although ELL students (with or without disabilities) are very diverse even among their own cultural groups, there are best academic practices and strategies that exist for students learning English according to research.

It is critical that teachers understand best practices for students learning English because according to research the high school drop-out rate for Hispanics (mostly students learning English as a second language) is double that of Caucasian and African American students (Gersten, Scott, Marks, & Smith, 2003, p. 10). In 2007, 21.4 percent of drop-outs were Hispanic students nationwide. In 2008, 18.3 percent of drop-outs were

from Hispanic decent as well. These percentages were the highest among other ethnic groups such as White, African American, American Indian, and Asian (<http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id6>). In North Carolina, statewide, in the year 2008-2009, the Hispanic drop-out rate (5.71) was higher than the state average of 4.27 percent. Locally, in the school system where the data from this study was collected, Hispanic students were the highest minority group represented in drop-out data during the 2008-2009 school year (<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/research/dropout/reports/>). In the school site where data was collected, only 25 percent of English Language Learners scored proficient on the standardized state test. Without the appropriate knowledge of language learning, students learning English as a second language will continue to struggle and the achievement gap will continue to widen.

Before educators implement specific ELL strategies for individual students, they must understand the different stages of second language acquisition in order to know which strategies are appropriate for students at their different developmental stages. The first stage is the preproduction stage. During this stage the student can speak simple English words but primarily should be learning vocabulary through naming objects and observing language interactions. Teachers can have students “explain the meaning of the word with picture and gestures....or have students create a visual representation of the new word” (Hill & Flynn, 2006, p. 30). Students also practice their listening skills primarily in this stage because their oral language skills are not yet fully developed. This first stage is often called “pre-production, or the silent period” because some students do not speak at all due to a temporary state of culture shock (Salend & Salinas, 2003, p. 39).



This culture shock is vividly demonstrated in the following quote from an immigrant child from China, “This is a totally different environment than I have been used to...the change is different because it upsets the kind of life I had. It was different back home. School was different, teachers were different. I feel depressed because I miss my friends in my country” (Igoa, 1995, p. 13). Teachers must be empathetic and sensitive to the needs of ELL students during this vulnerable stage. Students can learn during this stage and will absorb language, but teachers must be aware of their culture shock and not force them to speak until they feel comfortable. Once they feel comfortable in their new environment, they will produce more language as their individual second language skills develop.

During the second stage, “early production,” students are able to begin speaking in fragmented sentences and writing simple sentences in English. Teachers should allow students to label items while focusing on developing and increasing their vocabulary. During the third stage, “speech emergence,” students are able to “speak and write expanded sentences using “because”; therefore, the language function is explaining and describing” (Hill & Flynn, 2006, p. 30).

The third and fourth stages are Intermediate Fluency and Advanced Fluency (or the expansion period). In these stages students are able to discuss and expand on Basic English including complex sentence structures. Specifically, during the advanced fluency stage, student’s oral and written language should function very similar to that of an age appropriate native English speaker. ELL students operating at the advanced stage should

require minimal classroom modification in order for them to access the full academic content in English.

According to research, ELL learners can take up to 5-7 years to acquire academic language that equals that of a native English Speaker (Cummins, 1984). In addition to the acquisition of second language, Cummins notes the difference between academic language, which he calls CALPS (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency Skills), and social language, which he calls BICS (Basic Interpersonal Cognitive Skills). In other words, many English Language Learners become quite proficient in social language during their first three years in an English Speaking environment, but then they begin to struggle more with academic language (i.e. reading and content) because it takes much longer to acquire this type of language according to research (Cummins, 1984). The primary academic area of concern for a student learning English is usually reading, according to the text, “Classroom Instruction that works with English Language Learners” (Hill & Flynn, 2006). Reading skills develop later because students take longer to acquire academic content language.

Each year teachers receive a student’s English proficiency level from the state mandated English Language Proficiency test. The results provide the teacher with information as to what stage of language acquisition the student is in currently, and then teachers use this information to inform their lesson planning and testing modification decisions. There are many reasons why certain students may advance more quickly than other ELL students through the different stages of language acquisition. Key reasons for this difference are former schooling, parental support, interrupted schooling issues, high

transience (migrant students), second language aptitude, and personality factors (Peregoy & Boyle, 1997).

Ortiz (1990) describes three categories of students that experience academic difficulty for various reasons. Type I students are described as students learning English who experience academic failure due to barriers within their learning environment. These students do not realize and understand academic success because of barriers within their teaching and learning environment. For example, Type I students sometimes fail due to the lack of appropriate English as a second language program interventions or due to socioeconomic and/or cultural differences (Ortiz, 1990).

Type II students are students who encounter learning difficulties due to external environmental factors such as interrupted schooling or excessive absences. Interrupted schooling and differences in former schooling are major challenges facing today's English Language Learners. Interrupted schooling happens when a child is enrolled in school for a period of time and then either returns to their native country or resides in an environment where s/he is not forced to attend school yearly. Therefore, these "interruptions" produce gaps in content exposure and learning which in turn cause learning delays. Once students return to the U.S., they are required to enroll in U.S. schools and then are most likely placed age appropriately in a particular grade level.

Author and teacher, Cristina Igoa, commented on her own fragmented school experience:

More than 75 percent of the more than 100 immigrant children I have worked with in the past fifteen years have experienced gaps in their education because of travel, time needed for preparation of exit and entry documents, and moving around in search of a better home...Many children have skipped one grade or more (1995, p. 6).

Administrators are advised to place students in age appropriate grade levels in order to be equitable and also in order to diminish social problems among peers. Interrupted schooling and lack of formal schooling produce academic and social factors that can affect second language acquisition among ELL students. “ELLs with limited formal schooling and below-grade-level literacy are most at risk for educational failure...they are entering U.S. schools with weak academic skills at the same time that schools are emphasizing rigorous, standards-based curricula and high-stakes assessments” (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008, p. 7). Administrators and teachers must understand the potential for failure among these children by being proactive and providing early interventions and adequate English language teaching throughout all stages of second language development.

According to Ortiz (1990), Type III students are those ELLs who have been formally evaluated and have been found to have mild to severe disabilities such as mental retardation, speech/language disorder, emotional disturbances, or various learning disabilities. These students are those who require special education services in order to meet their unique disability needs in addition to their unique language needs.

A common link between ELL student academic and social factors is that of *parental support*. Research states that a lack of parental involvement is a key characteristic that can potentially lead to the identification of a disability in a student learning English as a Second Language (Zehler, A., Fleischman, H., Hopstock, P., Stephenson, T., Pendzick, M., Sapru, S., 2003, p. 35).

In my own experience of working with English Language Learners, the majority of ELL parents possess a strong desire to be involved in the education of their child, but they simply do not know how to help them or do not possess the language or educational skills to do so. Specific issues arise when parents decide not to encourage homework at all because they feel the deficit in their own knowledge of English will somehow harm their child's learning of English. Parents should support the use of their native language to encourage their children and make personal connections about the content of their homework when possible. "When parents use their native language to relate a story, their narrative will be rich with vocabulary and explanations...parents should be encouraged to model literacy" (Hill & Flynn, 2006, p. 78). Teachers and administrators must also work with interpreters to ensure that ELL parents know that they are able to support their child with homework practice, and they don't necessarily have to know English to do so. In addition, teachers and administrators should work together to plan and facilitate family literacy/parental involvement nights. These Literacy Nights should be provided to teach parents how to assist their children with homework, and should encourage them to encourage literacy in their first language. Parents are taught to provide positive feedback and make connections between school (class work) and home (homework).

Another social factor that affects ELL students is student mobility. Many ELL students are a part of a very transient population due to migrant work in which their parents are involved. Authors Glick and White (2004) state that "students with a previous move were twice as likely not to complete high school as those who had not moved". Not only do students experience educational gaps in different expectations

between teachers, districts, and states, but they also face difficulties acclimating to their new English speaking culture when they must move frequently. Although children are very resilient, some ELL students often withdraw. Negative attitudes about schooling due to their family mobility often create within them a sense of insecurity and instability in addition to their added frustrations of the language barrier.

Socioeconomic status also has powerful effects on English Language Learners because often families cannot provide economic means to support education or meet their basic needs. Research states that “poverty is a key predictor of school success” (Echevarria et al., 2008, p. 8). In addition, students and their parents who are undocumented encounter difficulty finding jobs to support their families, and therefore perpetuate the poverty dilemma, even though they come to the U.S. to find “a better life.” Undocumented status also creates struggles academically for students who desire to enter post-secondary institutions like colleges or universities (Echevarria et al., 2008). Students are currently not allowed to enter institutions of high learning without a social security number. Unfortunately, many ELLs are given an equal opportunity for education through high school, but then they must either return to their country for further study or enter the work force with no collegiate training.

There are also social stigmas that accompany children of undocumented families. This social stigma is a factor that potentially contributes to the disengagement of immigrant and ELL students because they can feel the negativity from members of society (i.e. teachers, staff members at times). “These [U.S] policies contribute to immigrants’ interests not being fully incorporated in societal discourses, deepen social

divides, and support notions of immigrants as second-class citizens” (Arzubiaga, Nogeron, & Sullivan, 2009, p. 247). In other words, if students learning English do not feel welcome with positive attitudes and respect for their culture, then society, and schools as a part of society, are setting them up for academic and social failure. Often times, only those students who are willing to rise above the societal stereotypes and poverty will be successful. This is where it is the legal and ethical obligation of public school teachers and administrators to create an atmosphere for learning where all children will feel equally valued and supported.

In a time where ELLs and their families face academic and social struggles, schools must develop an understanding of how they can reach out to English Language Learners and increase their capacity to meet their needs. According to research, there are many ways that schools and teachers can facilitate the academic success of ELL students. First, schools need to create positive, inviting learning environments for all children but specifically for multi-cultural children whose culture is not represented by the majority. Igoa states that “more than anything else, the immigrant child needs friendship, companions, warmth, and continued renewal and connection to his or her roots” (1995, p. 103). Teachers need to create learning opportunities where students feel accepted and appreciated for their uniqueness and difference. Students must acculturate into their new environment while not feeling as though they are leaving behind their background and first language. “Acculturation...allows the individual to become part of the mainstream culture without discarding past meaningful tradition and values” (Igoa, 1995, p. 44). By

using an additive approach, teachers and administrators capitalize on what students do know, and affirm the students' heritage while teaching the new language.

### **Instruction of ESL Students**

As instructional leaders, administrators must work with teachers so that they receive adequate professional development on how to plan, scaffold, and deliver meaningful lessons for ELL students with disabilities. Teachers must possess high expectations for ELL students and actively involve all learners in classroom activities (Echevarria & Graves, 2007, p. 81). Small group instruction and cooperative learning groups enhance student learning because students interact and the newfound knowledge is made more meaningful. Collaborative learning strategies allow students to feel confident in their ability and are more willing to take language risks necessary to learn because they are not alone but are able to consult their group for assistance. "Partner sharing and cooperative grouping can guarantee an equal opportunity for all to participate actively" (Echevarria & Graves, 2007, p. 87). In addition, the use of alternative instructional grouping and peer tutoring can greatly increase success rates for teaching reading among students learning English and students with disabilities (Elbaum, Vaughn, Hughes, Moody, & Schumm, 2003).

Role playing is another way to engage ELL students and is a strategy teachers can use to illustrate conceptual meaning, instead of forcing students to rely on written or spoken language. Role playing encourages a feeling of community and belonging in the classroom and promotes positive self esteem. To increase the effectiveness of interactive learning strategies, teacher should provide opportunities for students to use their native



language to enhance language comprehension. In addition, when students are given the opportunity to use their native language in class discussions, they feel that their language and culture are valued and respected (Echevarria & Graves, 2007). This feeling of value also affirms the individual students and encourages motivation to continue their efforts of learning a second language.

While teaching a second language teachers should also provide relevant background knowledge and scaffolding of new information so ELL students make appropriate connections to the new content. Scaffolding is a vital ELL strategy that should be implemented by all teachers to assist language acquisition and content learning. According to the famous researcher and psychologist, Lev Vygotsky, teachers should provide temporary supports in order to assist students in completing academic tasks. When students gain proficiency and confidence in the particular tasks, the “scaffolds” or “supports” can be removed for the students to work successfully and independently (Vygotsky, 1962, p. 51). These scaffolds can be academic scaffolds such as graphic organizers, use of the native language, key vocabulary, and use of an outline for a class lecture. Scaffolding can also be done through relationships of support in which ELL students feel that they can ask questions and take language risks through the help of a peer helper or assistant teacher.

Effective Instruction for English Language Learners who are also students with disabilities specifically should be a combination of language and content standards as identified on the individualized student education plan (IEP). According to research, planning instruction that allows students to work within their “zone of proximal

development – ZPD” will allow the students gain more meaning from instruction. Teachers must be taught to scaffold concepts for students until they learn the concept successfully without the scaffold. Specifically, ELL students need the specific scaffolding technique called, “comprehensible input.” “Comprehensible input is a scaffolding technique in that the language of instruction is within the students’ zone of proximal development...when the language of instruction is presented clearly, with meaningful examples and familiar props, comprehension is enhanced” (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002, p. 199). In other words, teachers must provide vivid examples of concepts that access students’ prior knowledge and illustrate concepts in various, meaningful ways.

Making concepts more comprehensible is critical for English Language Learners who also have disabilities. This can be done also by “providing students with opportunities to review previously learned concepts and teaching them to employ those concepts...and organizing themes or strands that connect the curriculum across subject areas” (Ortiz, 2001, p. 1). These connections are difficult for ELL students to see primarily because they are working very hard simply to understand vocabulary and translate from one language to another. Teachers can also use graphic organizers to assist English language Learners who are students with disabilities in organizing information and making connections. Organizing language into meaningful chunks allows for new information to be acquired effectively. Research states that most teachers have insufficient knowledge or prior training to teach students who are English language learners effectively and therefore provide minimal effective services (Sanchez, Parker, Akbayin, & Mctigue, 2010, p. 17).

### **Special Education Referral**

If students learning English as a Second Language do not respond to the aforementioned instruction, the teacher must then work together with the school pre-referral team to decide upon appropriate next steps and further intervention strategies.

Teachers and administrators must understand the appropriate referral process for students who are learning English to be referred to special education if needed. The Federal Government under IDEA (2004) requires “multi-disciplinary teams to establish a child’s eligibility and requires a number of procedures that protect the child and parent in the assessment process” (McLaughlin & Nolet, 2004, p. 10). First, in order to properly identify students with disabilities, students must be referred for special education consideration to a pre-referral committee at the local school level in order to ensure that proper interventions and screening take place. “Pre-referral interventions are used in the general education classroom to attempt to ameliorate the problem prior to referral to special education” (Yell, 2006). Once interventions are in place, the pre-referral committee uses various screening tools such as formal testing, classroom tests, student observations, and/or interviews, to ultimately make the collaborative decision to refer the student for psychological evaluation and testing for the exceptional children’s program. According to Yell, school districts create procedures concerning pre-referrals and referrals to special education, but this process does not fall under the federal laws of special education. Federal law governing special education, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004), enforces eligibility determinations once formal comprehensive evaluations have occurred. IDEA requires that professional judgment

must be executed by a committee of professionals and include parents when making instructional and eligibility decisions instead of basing decisions solely on individual test results (Yell, 2006). Ultimately, the final decision for eligibility determination is a two-fold decision: 1) “The child must first be determined to have a disability in one of the categories specified in IDEA,” and 2) “The child must have a need for special education because of the disability” (McLaughlin & Nolet, 2004, p. 10). In other words, not only must the child possess a disability in one of the fourteen categories of IDEA, but he/she must also show that regular education is not sufficient in order for the student to be successful. The student must demonstrate through testing results, academic records, ongoing intervention data, and teacher/parent observation that s/he is in need of a specialized education.

In North Carolina, the state enforces the legislation of IDEA through a series of forms, policies, and procedures that are found on the NCDPI Exceptional Children’s section website (<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/policy/forms/statewide>). After the local pre-referral team completes interventions and agrees to send the student on for screening and an evaluation, the team for students with disabilities, then uses a checklist provided through the Exceptional Children’s Division of DPI that teams use to decide on the eligibility of a student in a suspected area of disability. For each of the fourteen eligibility areas there is a worksheet/checklist provided by DPI for teams to use to properly identify students. If the child meets the criteria listed on the descriptions on the checklist, then the IEP team is then able to determine student eligibility for the exceptional children’s program ([www.ncpublicschools.org/ec/reources](http://www.ncpublicschools.org/ec/reources)). After a child is

considered “eligible” by the IEP team, the Individualized Education Plan is written which includes a present level of performance for the student, individual short-term and long-term goals, and testing modifications and accommodations. The IEP is annually reviewed and a full re-evaluation is done every three years to determine further eligibility for services.

In order to qualify for services under Title III, Programs for English Language Acquisition, a student must first be identified as a language minority student. The purpose of Title III is

to help ensure that children who are limited English proficient, including immigrant children and youth, attain English proficiency, develop high levels of academic attainment in English, and meet the same challenging State academic content and student academic achievement standards as all children are expected to meet” (Title III - Language Instruction for Limited English Proficient and Immigrant Students, 2002).

The U.S. Federal Government requires states to include the home language survey in every student’s initial enrollment forms, which determines their language minority status. If parents state that the student speaks another language at school or at home, then s/he is determined to be a language minority children and then must be assessed with the state adopted English Proficiency Test (Peregoy & Boyle, 1997, p. 90). Each state is able to choose the assessment it deems appropriate as long as it meets the Title III guidelines and is aligned with their current state standards. North Carolina, in conjunction with a consortium of other states, currently uses the WIDA assessment. WIDA stands for the World Class Instruction Design and Assessment (WIDA Consortium , n.d.). It is a consortium of twenty-two states that all use the same WAP-T and ACCESS tests to

measure English Language proficiency and growth. North Carolina adopted this assessment tool because of the success with which other states have had and the fact that the assessment was written to reflect English Language Standards (WIDA standards).

Once language-minority students are tested on the WAP-T, the student is considered eligible if s/he meets the cut scores for LEP (limited English proficient) students. If a student qualifies, then the ESL teacher at the local school adds him/her to his/her individual headcount and makes appropriate arrangements to serve him/her depending on his/her specific language needs. Depending on the actual test results of the ELL student, s/he would then either receive direct or consultative services. Directly served students are instructed by an ELL certified teacher several times per week, and a consultatively served student is only seen periodically (or as needed) in conjunction with on-going consultation from the ESL teacher and regular education teacher in order to ensure academic success. The difference between direct and consultative services can be different between school districts due to ambiguity in state and federal regulations. Consultative status is a stage of services immediately before a student officially “places” out of the ELL program.

Title III regulations require that school systems use Title III funds to meet the needs of students learning English as a Second Language. The legislation does not describe exactly what program model of service or particular methodology to use; therefore, types of service and frequency of ELL services may be different across the state (Guidelines for Testing LEP Students, 2005). No Child Left Behind (2001)

mandate that the program model be *research-based* and that data be provided to justify the actions of the local school district to meet the language needs of all ELL students.

When considering an ELL student for special education, the eligibility process becomes more involved due to language differences and the need to distinguish between a language barrier and a disability. “Every effort must be made to ensure that learning characteristics and behaviors are assessed, observed, and interpreted appropriately to avoid misplacement into special education...this is essential in the process to avoid misinterpreting language acquisition as learning disabilities (LD)” (Klingner, Hoover, & Baca, 2008, p. 93). First, teachers must remember to begin interventions for ELL students at the initial stages or signs of learning difficulty in the regular classroom. By supporting students learning English with early interventions, teachers can more accurately identify students who are struggling.

Small group instruction of at-risk learners is a pre-referral intervention that can significantly impact students’ educational outcomes and reduce the number of students being referred for special education ...it also assists in the diagnostic data collection process for referring those students who do not respond to intervention for special education assessment and services (Rinaldi & Samson, 2008, p. 7).

By beginning these interventions early and documenting their progress the teacher will possess the data needed to bring the student to the pre-referral team. Pre-referral teams must provide ELL students with sufficient time to acquire second language and adequate time to implement interventions that are culturally and linguistically appropriate. Time to implement interventions and analyze results is extremely important because research suggests that “neither the data gathered as part of the referral and

evaluation process nor the decisions made using these data reflect that professionals adequately understand limited English proficiency, second language acquisition, cultural and other differences which mediate students' learning" (Garcia & Ortiz, 1988, p. 2). In other words, the average teacher does not possess the understanding to make appropriate decisions concerning language acquisition and special education. Also, research says that "it is possible that teachers may be postponing referral decisions due to a lack of understanding of the intersection of second language development and LD (learning disabilities)" (Klingner, Artiles, & Barletta, 2006, p. 115). Therefore, regular education teachers and administrators must consult and make collaborative decisions with ELL and special education specialists in the field.

If students for whom English is a second language are referred to special education, they may need to be assessed in their native language by a bilingual psychologist in order to understand the content of the assessment and in order for educators to make an accurate eligibility decision. Assessments should be "conducted in both the native language and in English, as appropriate, and acculturation and learning styles [also] are examined" (Baca, 2005, p. 196). In short, if the student is bilingual and biliterate and requires a bilingual psychologist, teams can be assured that the results will be accurate since they are done in both languages.

All too often, due to cost, public schools do not recommend the contracting of bilingual psychologists to administer appropriate testing for ELL students. Occasionally monolingual teachers administer screening assessments in Spanish thinking that they are helping the student comprehend (i.e. K-BIT & Woodcock-Johnson). Even with good



intentions this process is not sound according to research and skews the validity of the assessment because the test administrator does not have the phonetic knowledge of Spanish (or other language) to pronounce the questions appropriately. This process can confuse ELL students, contribute to frustration, and produce false results. If school pre-referral teams feel that a bilingual psychologist is not needed, they should ensure that a verbal IQ test is not given because when testing ELL students, a verbal IQ test often measures the language proficiency of the student instead of the intellectual ability. According to research, it is more accurate to use a non-verbal measurement tool to assess an ELL student's IQ (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002, p. 5). Referral teams must be confident that they are actually testing what they intend to test in order to create the most accurate, positive solutions for ELL students.

When assessing English Language Learners for special education it is extremely important to include parents, through the use of an interpreter if needed, and provide ample explanation about the entire assessment process. Often times ELL parents not only do not understand the process due to the language barrier, but in their culture they also may not value education and have the same processes for educational placement and services as teachers do in U.S. schools. Parents provide useful information about language preference and use at home and in various social settings. They provide information about the child's personality and how it may affect his/her language acquisition and progress. It is also very useful to ask parents to provide information on their own cultural beliefs about education, intelligence, and disability. Through this discussion cultural differences become apparent and educators are then able to gain an

increased understanding of the specific challenges of the ELL student (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002, p. 2). This dialogue also validates their input as parents and establishes a positive relationship between school and home, which increases the opportunity for student academic success because parents understand and can better support their ELL child.

In many cultures, the U.S. included, there is a stigma associated with a child who is referred for special education services. When working with ELL students and their parents, teachers must work closely with the interpreter to explain procedures appropriately while trying to diminish any cultural misunderstandings. Hispanic cultures tend to view the word “disability” as solely a medical term often associated with physical disabilities. Interpreters must work diligently to explain the legalities of IDEA and parents’ rights but also must do so in a language and manner that they understand. This misunderstanding may be partly cultural but could also be socio-economical and educational depending on the level of education of the student’s parents. Some parents possess strong background knowledge of academic issues and others have not had the opportunity to be educated in their country. School referral teams must work collaboratively to ensure that parents are equal partners with their child’s academic team and are given the knowledge they need to be active participants in their child’s education.

Administrators, as instructional leaders, must work together with their faculties to educate both themselves and parents in how to best work with students learning English who also struggle academically. Students with limited English proficiency and students with disabilities are two subgroups of students under No Child Left Behind for which all principals will be held accountable. School leaders and teachers are therefore required to

be accountable for all diverse students and must employ strategies to advance their learning.

School leaders must develop a proactive approach to meeting the needs of English Language Learners and Students with Disabilities. According to research, these at-risk populations need immediate interventions at the first signs of academic struggles. All too often teachers and administrators wait until a student is considered “at-risk” to make any instructional modifications or interventions. This is a “wait to fail” approach instead of a preventative approach that is needed to reach diverse populations. By intervening at the very onset of academic difficulties, the student is given appropriate supports to enable him/her to learn effectively. Early intervention also assists referral teams in documentation that is needed to be able to send a child on for further screening or evaluation. In other words, if effective measures were taken from the onset of academic difficulties, then the team can clearly state that the student has not responded to appropriate interventions over time and this data can help justify the need for further testing and potentially identification for Students with Disabilities services. The documentation of early intervention also ensures that ELL students are not prematurely referred to special education, but instead are only referred after clinical teaching and intervention has taken place.

### **Principals as Instructional Leaders of ESL**

Effective principals as instructional leaders also possess and exhibit high expectations for all students and teachers in their building. Instructional leaders have a “clear sense of mission and control, tests the limits in providing needed resources, is persuasive and committed to high standards, uses a participatory style, and is not content to maintain the status quo” (Bevoise, 1984, p. 17). Principals as instructional leaders must realize that in order to possess high results, their high expectations must be clearly communicated and continually monitored throughout the school. Instructional leaders must continually increase achievement expectations so that teachers and students will continue to grow in their teaching and learning.

Research shows that principals of schools that possess a diverse population with low socio-economic students are most successful when they are highly visible throughout the building on a daily basis (Ellis, 1986, p. 3). Highly visible principals follow through and support their high expectations with frequent classroom visits and observations, on-going positive feedback, and a safe and orderly environment for student teaching and learning. Principals as instructional leaders should provide “frequent observation and/or participation in classroom instruction...and communicate high standards and expectations for the instructional program...These behaviors were found to have a positive effect on reading and mathematics achievement” (Savard & Cotton, 1983, p. 10). When students and teachers feel and see the presence of their principal they feel more secure and also see that their progress is being monitored by a caring professional.

A caring, compassionate attribute is particularly important in schools with low socio-economic background because they receive at school what they may not receive at home – a caring, supportive learning environment. “Effective instructional leaders are responsive to the socioeconomic context of their schools and communities”(Ellis, 1986, p. 3). Principals as instructional leaders realize that they must lead with cultural relevance, meaning they value students’ different cultural backgrounds because they realize that they possess unique instructional and social needs reflective of their cultures. The teaching must be diverse and modified to meet the instructional needs of the students. The curriculum itself must also be diverse so that the students can see themselves and find interest in the curriculum materials. If students relate well to the curriculum they are more likely to be motivated to excel because they can make a personal connection and find a purpose for learning the new material.

In order for administrators to meet the needs of diverse students, they must lead with cultural relevance. In order to do so they must lead with a sense of acceptance and tolerance for student differences. English Language Learners and Students with Disabilities specifically need to have teachers and administrators who are advocates for them as students. Principals must work with leadership teams to establish positive, inclusive environments where differences are viewed as contributions. Administrators must stress to teachers that they should capitalize on student differences in order to validate and affirm the students as individuals and validate the cultures from which they come. For example, a principal in a large Texas school district with many diverse learners made the following comment about student differences: “As the students heard

that the principal validate their language over the loud speaker, they knew it was all right to speak Spanish. It was even more than all right; they began to take pride in their native language like I have never seen before” (Guadarrama, 1993, p. 7). Validating students’ cultures contributes to an environment of acceptance and encouragement for all students.

Valuing students’ cultures must be established as an expectation by the instructional leader/principal from the beginning of the academic year in order for teachers to know what is expected in the classroom. Principals must clearly communicate this expectation and ensure strong accountability for staff members working together to create the atmosphere needed to support differentiated instruction. Negative attitudes must be minimized and managed by the principal in order for the school climate to remain positive with respect to diverse learners. The school environment must “reflect a philosophy that all students can learn and that educators are responsible for helping them learn” (Ortiz, 2001, p. 1). Teachers must be taught themselves through training and empathic learning activities that English Language Learners and Students with Disabilities have much to offer and deserve the opportunity to learn equal to other students. One teacher in a public school made the following statement in reference to ELL students: “Their only limits are their mental attitude and their command of English. Whatever they want to attain, they can...and they’ll attain more for being bilingual” (Norrid-Lacey & Spencer, 1999, p. 10). This additive, positive approach must be established from the top-down. The principal must first set this expectation and then teachers must follow and support the positive, inclusive learning environment for all students.

Teachers and administrators must assist ELL students in understanding that they need to use their first language in order to advance the acquisition of their second language. In other words, ELL students will learn and become literate in English quicker if they are encouraged to use their knowledge of first language (prior knowledge) to help them comprehend. According to research, literacy skills transfer quickly when established first in native language. The concepts are already there and can be reinforced by parents at home (in native language), while the student continues the same concepts, but learns them in the new language at school (Echevarria & Graves, 2007, p. 7). The use of native language is very useful to ELL students, but is often difficult to accommodate at school due to lack of qualified human resources. Nevertheless, principals must be advocates for ELL students and use interpreters, parent volunteers, and teachers resourcefully. Even if the native language cannot be used by qualified professionals at work, the teacher and administration can support the use of student peer helpers in native language to assist with comprehension.

### **Training for Teachers**

Principals as instructional leaders must support teachers by helping them obtain appropriate curriculum materials to meet the needs of diverse children. This support can be defined as monetary, budget support through materials and extra human resources in addition to personal support by organizing needed training and staff development. Appropriate training is crucial for teachers to acquire the knowledge needed to meet the needs of specifically English Language Learners and Students with Disabilities. In addition, principals must encourage and praise the efforts of teachers as they strive to

change and improve their practice. The work of a strong principal as instructional leader is about “building respect for teachers, supporting teachers, teachers feeling more successful, teachers not surrendering, and teachers not giving up and then still working” (McBeath, 2006, p. 6). Teachers are more likely to increase personal motivation to do their best when they feel like they are being supported by their direct supervisor. Principals must continually balance supporting their teachers while also holding them accountable for instructional practices and individual student results.

In order to produce positive results for potential at-risk students,(both English Language Learners and Students with Disabilities), principals as instructional leaders must make specific staff development and training a priority for teachers. Teachers must be given the “tools” needed to teach appropriate strategies that will help English Language Learners and Students with Disabilities to process information more effectively and gain appropriate meaning and understanding from instruction. Principals must evaluate their staff to know who has or has not had specialized training in meeting the needs of English Language Learners and Students with Disabilities. Then, he/she must plan with district instructional facilitators (or including outside trainers) accordingly. Many research studies suggest that many of today’s teachers who are responsible for teach English Language Learners and Students with Disabilities in the mainstream classroom have not had adequate training to meet their individual needs. Many teachers are “in their first year of teaching, with no special training, [and are] given classes for English Learners” (Norrid-Lacey & Spencer, 1999, p. 9). Even if the numbers of English Language Learners and/or Students with Disabilities are low in a school, teachers need to



be given appropriate training because at some point they will be required to teach these diverse learners. Principals must be very intentional in their planning of staff development and take a proactive stance in gaining appropriate training for teachers so that they will be prepared whenever they must teach a student with exceptional needs.

In addition to administrative responsibilities that support teachers, what are the actual strategies that teachers need to know in order to effectively instruct English Language Learners and Students with Disabilities? First, English Language Learners and special needs students both need opportunities to work collaboratively and to be taught through conversations. These students need to feel that they can rely on their peers for help and they are learning and exchanging knowledge. They need to be able to make personal connections from conversations in class to their personal lives and to other aspects of the curriculum (literacy) (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002, p. 199). Working collaboratively through small group instruction provides students with opportunities to obtain more individual attention from the instructor and also helps to establish a “community” of learners within the larger class.

As administrators look toward the future, they must understand and embrace the diversity that exists and that will continue to grow in our schools. Not only are English Language Learners and Students with Disabilities diverse in language proficiency and ethnicity, but they are diverse through their own learning styles (kinesthetic, visual, tactile...etc.). Principals as instructional leaders must teach their teachers through example and explicit expectations to take a preventative approach and identify student struggles as soon as they develop. They must then employ research-based teaching

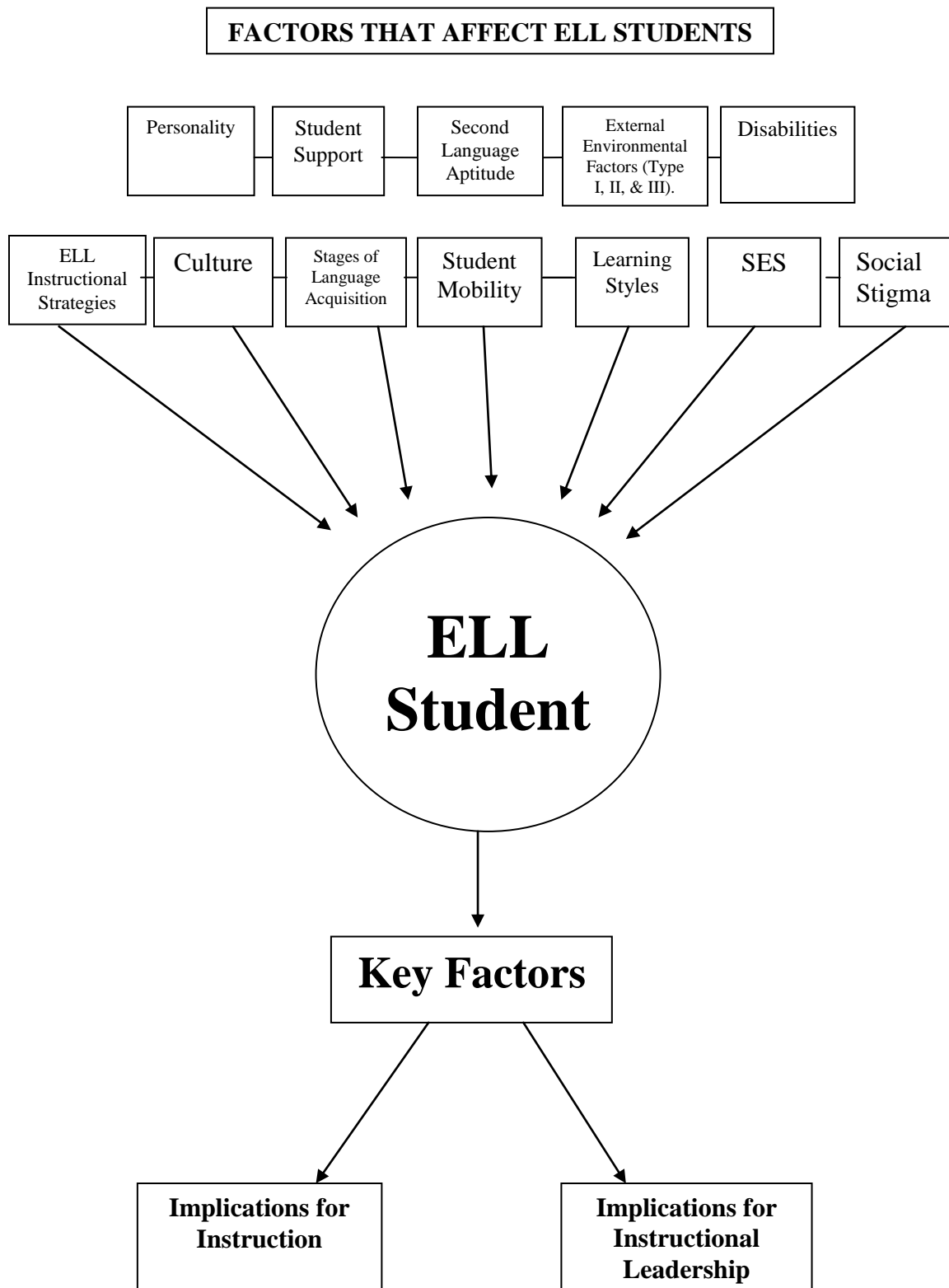
techniques that will enable students to use their first language to assist them in learning their second language. Students must also be given the differentiated instruction needed to help them achieve academic success despite learning disabilities or language differences. Overall, principals must closely monitor the school environment and classroom instruction in order to make sure that teachers are implementing effective teaching techniques that will help diverse learners acquire language and content productively.

### **Conceptual Framework**

From the review of the literature I have developed a conceptual framework to guide the analysis of each ELL student case. The factors listed at the top of the following framework are what the literature states are key issues affecting ELL students. Next, I analyzed each student case based upon the data and ascertained which factors are most prevalent from the data that affect each student. Finally, based upon the analysis, I have derived implications for the instruction of ELL students and implications for the Instructional Leadership that supports the students learning English.

I actually developed the conceptual framework toward the end of my analysis in order to clarify the findings and to guide the reader in understanding the primary elements affecting English Language Learners taken from the literature. The conceptual framework has evolved through different stages beginning with the general one for all students for whom English is a Second Language to more specific information about the participants' cases.

Figure 1



Personality can play a significant role in a student's progress learning a second language. Personality involves specific attributes that one possesses that affect one's interactions with others. If a student is introverted, he or she typically will not be as willing to take the conversational language risks as an extroverted student will. These risks lead to language learning through the experience of authentic conversation. Typically, the more a student interacts socially, the more conversational skills a student will learn. The more academic and language risks that a student is willing to take, the more quickly a student will learn to communicate in a second language.

Student support is an additional factor that directly affects the rate of progress for an ELL student. Teacher support in the form of academic interventions and parental support at home are both components of support that ELL students need in order to be successful. These support measures affect the progress at which a student acquires a second language.

Without significant support, teachers and students become frustration which leads to a decrease in students' language proficiency and a slower rate of second language acquisition. Additionally, a lack of student support eventually leads to a decrease in overall motivation and ELL student achievement. In order to support students, teachers and parents must know how to do so. In other words, they must receive appropriate training on how to help their student and support their language acquisition.

Second language aptitude is an individual student's innate ability to learn a second language. Similar to multiple intelligences, some students possess more ability or talent to learn a second language. In other words, some students acquire a second

language with more quickly and easily while others can learn a second language but require must more intentional effort.

Students who possess little second language aptitude may take longer to acquire a second language. Additionally, some students may possess a deficit in second language learning ability and actually possess a language disorder that impedes their ability to learn and acquire a second language proficiently. It often becomes difficult to distinguish between second language aptitude, second language acquisition, and a language disorder, because these can all play a role in a student's rate of second language acquisition. External environmental factors consist of issues that affect an ELL student's learning such as lack of appropriate English as a second language interventions (Type I ELL student), interrupted schooling, chronic absences (Type II students), and/or severe learning disabilities (Type III students). All of these external issues in a student's learning environment can affect the rate at which a student acquires a second language.

More pervasive external factors such as severe mental retardation, speech/language disorder, emotional disturbances, or learning disability can further complicate and impact the rate at which a student learns a second language and his/her overall proficiency in English.

A disability is a potential factor that can impede the progress and rate of language acquisition in a second language learner. If a student possesses a learning disability, it can be disguised as a language barrier for many years until educators are able to obtain the data needed to justify the lack of progress as not being primarily a result of language difference. A disability and language barrier can mimic one another while a student

progresses through stages of language acquisition. The most significant impact is typically a slow rate of progress in the area of written language – reading and/or writing.

Instructional strategies that work best for students learning English as a second language must be used by regular classroom teachers and ELL specialist in order to maximize student progress and proficiency. Teachers must receive appropriate training in order to understand how to incorporate appropriate ELL strategies into their daily instruction. These ELL instructional strategies are aligned with best practices and ELL research.

The use of appropriate ELL instructional strategies can play a significant role in the overall progress of ELL students because they provide academic support as students move through various stages of language acquisition. Typically, if provided significant and appropriate support through instructional strategies, an ELL student will progress at a usual rate (5-7 years) without significant academic struggles. On the other hand, without appropriate support through instructional strategies, the ELL student will often struggle academically, most often in literacy skills, which eventually affects his/her progress across content areas.

Culture is a factor that can affect differences in learning and even the rate at which an ELL child learns a second language. Culture involves the traditions and beliefs of a group of people. Culture affects education because many parents of ELL students value education differently. For example, often times Hispanic parents possess an ultra respect for educators and feel as though teaching their child is solely the role of the

school. In other words, parents are not used to being responsible for the teaching of their child at home.

In other cultures, cultural differences exist including physical cues such as eye contact and student participation in class. Some ELL students have difficulty accepting the instruction of a teacher who is a different gender than the student. Other students come from such primitive environments in their home country that they remain in a state of culture shock for six months to a year until they become accustomed to their new environment. Educators must realize and affirm these cultural differences through patience and appropriate teaching techniques that show that they value cultural differences while accelerating their second language learning.

Second language acquisition is a factor that affects language learning because students progress through different stages as they enter U.S. schools for the first time and then develop more advanced English proficiency skills as they acquire new language. When students are new English language learners, one could often mistake them for having a disability because of the lack of understanding and slow progress that is usually present. Also, students in a state of culture shock and who are in the beginning stages of second language acquisition may not speak or respond orally at all until they are comfortable in their learning environment.

Student mobility is a factor that affects second language learning because students often regress in their language learning when they return to their home country for a period of time and then return to an English speaking setting. Many ELL students possess interrupted schooling issues due to frequent mobility that “interrupts” and often

delays both academic learning and language learning. For instance, students may return to their country where the content level and academic rigor is less and then are behind when they return to the more rigorous academic setting.

Interrupted schooling issues often affect middle and high school age children the most severely because academic content is more difficult. In addition, it becomes very difficult for some students who return to their country because in the home country they are not made to attend school every day or consistently at all (as opposed to U.S. compulsory attendance). These absences significantly “interrupt” academic content learning for the student.

Learning styles of ELL students can also affect the way in which a student learns and the rate at which a student learns language. If a teacher only teaches using the techniques that appeal to a tactile learner he/she will not reach and enhance student learning for students who are visual learners. Teachers must use an eclectic approach in order to meet the needs of all ELL students. ELL students often need visual cues and visual aids to help aid comprehension of certain concepts so that they do not have to rely solely on written text for understanding. Using an enhanced visual approach helps ELL students to comprehend more quickly and more accurately which in turn helps them to retain new information.

Socio-economic status directly affects ELL students because if students are living in poverty they do not usually possess the rich language atmosphere that supports school readiness skills and academics. Students and parents living in poverty often possess a



survival mentality in which their primary concern is meeting their basic needs such as food, water, clothing, and shelter.

In addition, typically students living in poverty possess parents who are uneducated and do not possess the skills or understand to support their child academically. Teachers often perceive parents and students living in low SES environments as not “caring” about their education, when in reality, they are simply concerned about surviving the next week or months with little or no monetary support.

Social stigma is a feeling created by society that makes a specific cultural group feel as though they are not as worthy or do not deserve the same treatment as do the traditional social group – in this case, American, English-speakers. Social stigma is a factor that could affect students who are English Language Learners because some people possess the misconception that students who do not speak English should not be here. This feeling of “not belonging” could easily be translated into the school culture if teachers and administrators do not offer a positive, welcoming and culturally relevant learning environment for all students.

The aforementioned items are factors that can contribute to learning struggles for an English Language Learner. Any individual factor or combination of the factors can affect the rate in which a student acquires English as a Second Language.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **Research Questions**

In order to obtain a better understanding of how English Language learners learn and obtain success amidst the multiple barriers and struggles that they may encounter, I investigated the answers to the following questions as a part of this research study.

- First, from their own perspectives, what are these two English Language Learners with disabilities' understandings and perceptions of their educational experiences learning English in U.S. Schools?
- Secondly, what are the struggles that they encounter, being students learning English as a Second Language, and students with disabilities?
- Finally, what are the students', teachers', and parents' perceptions of factors that have affected their progress or contributed to their frustrations?

#### **Methodology**

As the method for research, I completed a case study of two students who are current fifth-year students learning English as a Second Language. In order to answer the questions dealing with students' perceptions of their experiences learning English while also being students with disabilities, I felt that it was appropriate to study in detail

the multiple factors that affect student learning, as perceived by the students themselves, teachers, and parents.

### **Key Concepts and Definitions**

Key concepts included in the study are the terms, English as a Second Language, students with disabilities, and pre-referral teams. Students learning English as a Second Language are students who learned and speak another language as a primary language and who are learning English due to being in English-speaking schools. Students with disabilities are those with

mental retardation, hearing impairments (including deafness), speech or language impairments, visual impairments (including blindness), serious emotional disturbance, orthopedic impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments, or specific learning disabilities, and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services (IDEA, 2004).

A pre-referral team is a group that includes teachers, guidance counselors, school psychologists, and often times an administrator who work together to make intervention decisions and ultimately decisions based upon whether or not a student will go on to be referred for an evaluation for special education.

Other key terms in this study are English Language Learners (ELL), Limited English Proficient (LEP), and Newcomer Programs. The term English Language Learners (ELL) refers any student who is learning English as his/her second language and who speaks another language other than English as a native language. Limited English Proficient (LEP) is the term used by the Federal Government under Title III legislation to refer to the child whose speaks a language other than English as his/her first language and

who has officially scored below the threshold score as having proficient English skills on the state adopted English Language Proficiency test. Newcomer programs are programs designed to serve students for whom English is a Second Language who have just recently arrived in the United States. Most newcomer programs serve ELL students intensively for six months up to two years in the areas of survival English, Literacy, and vocabulary development. Newcomer programs assist students in transitioning through the stage of culture shock and provide a support system for them to acquire English in a supported, structured environment before transitioning into their home school with less ELL support and more challenging content vocabulary.

### **Research Setting**

The research setting for this study was Elmwood Elementary School. I selected this setting because this is the school where the two students that I interviewed as participants in the study currently attend school. This particular school currently has the largest population of students learning English as a Second Language in the local county school district.

The two participants that I studied are both students in their fifth year as students in the English as a Second Language Program. Each of these students has struggled academically during his/her education in U.S. schools, continues to struggle, and have both been referred for special educational services. As a former English as a Second Language teacher, I am particularly interested in how these two students perceive their own progress and limitations. I chose these two students because I have taught these two students as an ESL teacher and assisted with these students also as a district ESL lead

teacher and the complexity of their individual cases have interested me for several years. Now, as a school administrator at their school, I see these students and watch their interactions daily with staff members and their peers. As a member of the pre-referral team I am very interested to encounter what other struggles these students possess in addition to their language barrier and cultural differences. I am also specifically interested in how these students and their families perceive their own educational experiences here in U.S. schools throughout the past five years.

In order to gain insight into the lives and educational experiences of the two fourth grade students, I interviewed their former teachers (Kindergarten through fourth grade), their parents, and the students themselves. There were 18 teachers (each former teacher from K-4<sup>th</sup> grade and intervention teachers), two students, and two parents (one from each student due to the fact that the other parent was in Mexico during the interview process) who participated in the study. Each participant was interviewed for one hour. I conducted the interviews by asking the teachers, students, and parents to participate in the interview as explained on the informed consent form. I conducted interviews during the school day and immediately after school. Occasionally I adjusted my interview sessions to be flexible with times when the students' parents could participate. The questions that I used as a part of the interview are as follows:

#### Interview Protocol – Students

1. When did you enter U.S. Schools?
2. Were you in school before in your home country?
3. How did you feel about learning English and attending English speaking school when you first began in Kindergarten or first came to the U.S.?
4. Why do you think you felt this way?

5. What helped you to adjust to attending English-Speaking school?
6. Did you experience difficulty in the transition?
7. What was your experience when you first came to the U.S.?
8. What was your experience after the first year?
9. What was your experience during this past year or two?
10. Did you like your teacher and classmates?
11. What made you feel good (or bad) about your learning?
12. What or who has helped you the most to learn English and academics?
13. What has your teacher done in the class that has helped you the most?
14. What do you like about going to school here?
15. What do you dislike about going to school here?
16. What is your favorite subject in school?
17. What is your least favorite subject in school?
18. Why do you think that this subject is hard for you?

#### Interview Protocol – Parents

1. When did your children enter U.S. Schools?
2. Do you think the transition was difficult or easy for your child (when entering English speaking schools) and why?
3. How do you think your child felt about attending school where they spoke all English and no Spanish?
4. What do you think helped your child to adjust?
5. What was your experience with your child in school when you first came to the U.S.?
6. What was your experience with your child in school after the first year?
7. What was your experience with your child in school during the last couple of years?
8. What do you feel has helped your child the most academically?
9. What do you feel your child still needs academically?
10. Are you happy and satisfied with your child's educational experiences?  
Why or why not?
11. What difficulties has your child experienced in school (academic, social, or linguistic)?
12. What has the school and/or teacher done to help your student?
13. Does your student struggle with learning? Why or why not?
14. What do you need to be able to help your student at home academically?
15. What do you think the school still needs to do (or do more of) to help your child learn effectively?

#### Interview Protocol – Teachers

1. When did you teach this student           (name of student)          ?

2. How much English did he speak when he was in your class?
3. Did he struggle academically? How?
4. What type of strategies did you use in meeting his educational and linguistic needs?
5. How did he interact with the other children in your class?
6. What were your primary concerns with his learning?
7. What were your experiences working with his parents?
8. Do you feel like the parents had adequate help in understanding their role in their child's education?
9. How did the parents support their child's education?
10. What was the student's strongest subject?
11. What was the student's weakest subject?
12. Why do you think the student struggled in this area?
13. What do you think he needed that you couldn't provide?
14. Did you feel prepared to teach this student? Why or why not?
15. What type of training have you had in meeting the needs of students learning English as a Second Language?

After interviewing all participants, I transcribed each interview and made connections and found themes based upon the trends in the data. I analyzed both participant responses and interview field notes that I made and collected throughout the interview process. I then categorized the data that I collected according to reoccurring themes. I used the reoccurring themes to code the data appropriately. In addition, I collected student record data including test scores, attendance, and grade marks to gain contextual information about the two students.

As a researcher, I ensured that this study is trustworthy through persistent analysis of multiple interview transcriptions from multiple sources (teachers, parents, and students). I employed trustworthy strategies of member checking and peer reviews to ensure that my analysis and conclusions are accurate. In addition, I transcribed all interviews and kept transcriptions in order to prove and support my analysis and personal conclusions based upon the findings.

The specific benefits of the study for participants includes an enhanced understanding of the specific factors that affect the progress of students learning English as a Second Language who are also students with disabilities. Teachers have benefited from the study by learning what caused these two students to struggle academically. The findings have supported the importance for using appropriate research-based methods of instruction for ELL students and students with disabilities. For the students themselves and their parents, I feel that this study has helped them to feel as though their voices are heard and have provided insight into methods that seem to be most effective in teaching students with these special needs and/or differences. Risks of the study were minimal due to the fact that all transcriptions and recordings have been kept in a safe and secure location during the study and all information will continue to remain confidential. Once the study concludes, the recorded interviews will be destroyed.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study, which includes understanding the perceptions and struggles of students learning English as a Second Language who are also students with disabilities, is significant because as the population of students learning English as a second language increases, the need for increased understanding of the factors that affect student learning and progress will also increase. The more immigrant students that arrive in U.S. schools, the higher the need to serve them appropriately and to understand how to distinguish between a language barrier, a disability, and those students who possess both differences. Teachers must evolve in their practice just as the population evolves and becomes more diverse. Parents, teachers, and administrators should find this study useful and



informative as they all seek to better understand the many factors that affect learning for students learning English as a Second Language.

### **Subjectivity**

I am particularly interested in the topic of English Language Learners because of my cross-cultural experiences of living in Ecuador, South America. At the age of two my parents and I moved to Costa Rica, South America where my parents attended language school to learn Spanish. After nine months of language school we moved to Ecuador where both of my parents were educators at an international school in the port-city of Guayaquil. We lived there for four and a half years.

During this time I experienced how it felt to be a child in a foreign land where the language and culture were very different from what my parents and I knew. The feeling of being different from my classmates at school and looking “foreign” are memorable experiences that have helped me build empathy for immigrant children and their families. I understand firsthand what it feels like to speak one language at home and then go to school and community and hear another. It feels as though one lives a split life, but it can be a very positive experience if one has sufficient support.

I have also developed a deep empathy toward immigrant families because I have seen and remember clearly the impoverished conditions in which many children live. They survive but only with very basic needs met. Socio-economic status is the primary difference between my cross-cultural experience and the majority of today’s English Language Learners living in the United States. I was from a middle class family whereas many children of immigrant parents in Ecuador were living in impoverished

environments and operated primarily in a survival mode. This survival mentality is still reality for many English Language Learners and their families today in U.S. Schools. Even though many families live in a state of poverty in the U.S., it is still much better than the environment and living conditions from which they came in their home country.

Many years later when I was studying foreign language and education as an undergraduate student I returned to the port-city of Guayaquil to teach English as a Second Language to adolescents and adults. This experience was unique because this time I was a teacher and had chosen to be there. I was reminded of the students living in poverty and the survival mentality that is so prevalent in many third-world countries. Education was considered a privilege and being a teacher was one of the noblest professions one could choose.

In reflection, living overseas and learning a second language as a young child has impacted my world view and understanding bilingualism because I learned at a very young age that other peoples existed who spoke different languages and lived in different places. In other words, I learned that there was a world outside of myself and the state in which I lived that was equally as important as mine. Out of this experience I developed a passion for helping immigrant children learn English and helping their families understand education in the U.S. as a tool for a successful future for their children.

I have become an advocate for bilingualism from my childhood experience because I realize how U.S. culture is changing and students must be able to compete in a society where many of the world's population are bilingual and even multi-lingual. Bilingualism is an appropriate 21st century skill that should be taught to school-age

children so that they will possess the tools necessary to compete in a global and competitive society.

Overall, my motivation for this study stems from a deep compassion that I developed through my childhood experience of living in Ecuador. I desire to continue to be a role model and resource for bilingual students and their families and to encourage them to persevere through the struggles to achieve academic success.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA**

The following sections have been divided according to subheadings of description and the analysis of the data collected from the study. The organization of the following sections this chapter was completed based upon the findings of data collected during interviews from the two students, Franco and Jose, their parents, and their former teachers. I also incorporated my own understanding and knowledge of the two students as their former ESL teacher, District Lead ESL teacher, and school administration. I have written the following description sections in first person in order to provide authentic presentation of data as if the participants were speaking themselves. Hearing the participants tell their stories provides unique insight into their lives and their worlds.

#### **Description: Franco**

I am Franco and I am ten years old. My parents came to the United States fourteen years ago to begin a new life here in North Carolina. I was born in Lenoir County and moved to Thomasville when I was three. There were a lot of Hispanic people in Lenoir County. My parents and I had many friends there. Once we moved, my parents had to get new jobs here. Today, my parents both work in a local factory and work hard to provide me and my sister with a good life – a better life than they had in

Mexico or in Lenoir County. My father works long hours and I don't get to see him much. My mother works too, but is at home more with my sister and me in the afternoons. My parents are originally from Durango, Mexico. They talk about their home and my grandparents who still live in Mexico. Dad has to go back and check on them once or twice a year. We go back to visit Mexico twice a year, but North Carolina is *my home* where I now live with my mother, father and younger sister. Even though my parents are from Mexico, I was born here, so I am an American, but I still feel like "Mexico is a part of me."

I started school here when I was four when I attended pre-school at a church down the street from my house. It was really a daycare, but it had pre-school for kids who were four and five years old. I liked pre-school because we got to play games and speak English and Spanish. My teacher taught us in English and my teacher assistant spoke Spanish with those of us who needed help learning English. I was nervous at first, but I could speak Spanish to one of my teachers and she would help me when I didn't understand what the other teacher was saying. I met a lot of friends there. Some of them spoke Spanish and English just like me! While in pre-school I learned my colors, numbers, and letters in English. I didn't really learn them in Spanish, except for when my mom would teach me at home. I could count to ten in Spanish. I went to preschool one year and "learned to talk English some" before I started Kindergarten at Elmwood.

In Kindergarten, I had Mrs. Hardy as a teacher. She was very nice and I liked her very much. Going to school was fun! I loved to learn English and play with my friends. Sometimes, my teacher would ask me to help another kid understand what she was

saying, because she spoke only Spanish and was learning English for the first time like I did in pre-school. I translated for my mom too when she would come to school and eat lunch with me. My dad came to school some too for conferences. He speaks more English, so I didn't have to translate for him. Sometimes I wouldn't understand everything in English though, and I missed having my teacher assistant like in pre-school to help explain things to me in Spanish. I also had another teacher that year, my ESL teacher, Mrs. Celia. She helped me learned English and would practice speaking English with me two times a week. She also talked with my parents and told them what I needed to work on at home. Mrs. Celia could talk Spanish, and my mom would call her a lot when she didn't understand my papers from school. English "caused me some trouble because I was thinking in Spanish." I liked Mrs. Celia, but I just wanted to see her more. She could only come see me two days a week for a few minutes each day. She had to spend more time with the students that didn't speak any English at all. I tried to help them too sometimes, because they were my friends and I remember what it feels like to not speak English.

At the end of Kindergarten, something very special happened! It made me very excited – my mom had a baby. I had just turned six and my little sister was born. My mom didn't have as much time at home then to help me with homework, because she was taking care of the baby. I had to help her a lot too! I like helping my mom with my sister because she told me that I had to be the man in the house when my dad was gone back and forth to Mexico. I had to help take care of my mom and sister and still do when my dad is gone away to Mexico.

In first grade, Mrs. Eddy was my teacher. She was very nice and also asked me to help her understand Spanish when my mom would come in for a conference. My favorite subject in her class was Math. I was very good at Math. I learned to add and subtract numbers in English that year. I also liked reading and writing. This year was one of my favorites because I had several good friends in my class who also spoke Spanish and English. I liked first grade because I felt smart in Mrs. Eddy class. We read books that I could understand, and we played in centers where I could talk to my friends. I understood just about everything that my teacher would say in English because “I got to hear English everyday and got the hang of it.” My mom would try to help me every day with my homework. I had to read every night. I tried to read to her since she couldn’t understand some of the words. She tried to help me and when she didn’t understand she would call and ask our neighbor to help me. Sometimes, she took me to the library to read and check out books of my own. My mom would check out Spanish books that she liked and I would check out books in English to read to her and to my little sister.

The next year I had Mrs. Clodfelter as my teacher for second grade. I liked her class too, but reading was hard for me this year. The books were harder and the questions that the teacher would ask me about the books were harder than first grade. Half way through second grade, a special reading teacher started coming to my class to see me. I got to go see her in Title I every day for forty-five minutes. Mrs. Celia also still came to help me two times per week. She helped me a lot, but I wished I could see her every day. I had a lot of bilingual friends in my class who went out with me with Mrs. Celia for ESL class. School was fun except that reading and writing were hard. My

teacher gave me a special writing folder with a lot of words in it to help me remember how to spell words. This made it easier, and it helped me some. My reading teacher sent books home for me to read with my parents. This was hard for my mom because she couldn't speak or read in English. She tried to help me, but I told her that the words did not sound right when she read them, and I couldn't understand. "They sounded like Spanish words but they were not." The hardest thing for me in reading was that "I didn't know how to say all the words and then I couldn't remember what happened in the story." My teacher said that I just needed more practice, so she kept sending different books home with me to read. Mom also tried to find other people to help me, like my friend's older brother and my neighbor. She also continued to take me to the library to let me check out books that I wanted and liked to read.

In third grade, I had Mrs. Tam. She was very nice and I liked her class because I got to play sports outside with her and my friends. My ESL teacher, Mrs. Celia, said that I speak English so well this year that I don't need to see her but one time a week. So, I met with her only on Wednesdays. "I felt kind of good this year because I was more learning." I don't have a reading teacher this year because my teacher said that we didn't have that program now. My teacher still helps me in the classroom, though. Reading is still hard for me because "it is hard for me to sound the words out." My mom is trying to help me at home also, by teaching me how to read some in Spanish. It is also hard to read in Spanish, but when my mom reads to me, I can understand it. "Sometimes I get confused, but I keep trying." Mrs. Tam tries to help me by myself a little bit each day. I like it best when Mrs. Tam reads a story to the class. I can answer the questions then, and



get good grades on the test. I got mostly Bs and Cs this year on my grades, except for Science, and I got an A! I really like Science. “I like learning about animals and plants and stuff.”

I didn’t pass the EOG test this year in reading, but I did pass it in Math. I had to go to summer school and take the test again for reading. I didn’t pass it the second time, but I still passed third grade. I was glad to be able to go to fourth grade with my friends. My mom took me to the summer library program for a couple of weeks in the summer before we went to Mexico to visit. I saw my grandmother and my cousins that I had not seen in a year! “What I like best about visiting my grandmother is when she cooks me her special enchiladas.” We always have a big party when we go to visit and the food is very good!

In fourth grade I had Mrs. Weis. This was my hardest year so far. I am getting better at Math this year. I can understand just about everything except for the word problems. They are hard because I cannot read all of the words. When my teacher reads the problems to me, I can do really well in Math. I am still seeing Mrs. Sims, my Title I Reading teacher. She says that I’m really smart and can retell stories really well. I am still having trouble with Reading in my classroom, though. I can’t read as fast as the other kids. “I feel the smartest when I am working with Mrs. Weis.” I just need the stories to be read to me. I don’t like reading by myself because it is too hard. I just can’t remember the sounds. “I wish I could read more better by myself.” The sounds are different in Spanish than they are in English and I get them confused. It is hard for me to stretch the words out and sound the words out. I especially don’t like reading homework.

My mom makes me do it as soon as I get home, and she knows that I do not like it. I don't like it because it takes me a long time to do it and remember the story. Once someone tells me the words, I can understand everything about the story. My grades went down a little this year – I made mostly Cs and one D. I did not pass the Reading End-of-Grade test this year again, but I did in Math. I had to take the Reading test twice and it was very long and very hard. I don't have to go to summer school this year though. My mom talked with the principal and she said that I will get to go on to fifth grade with my friends. The thing I liked most about fourth grade was playing soccer with my friends and teacher during recess time. There are several kids in my class who speak Spanish who all like soccer just like me. We like playing together every day like we're a team.

This summer we are going to Mexico again. I can't wait to see my grandmother and my uncles, aunts, and cousins. My grandmother has been sick, and my father had to leave and go take care of her during the last two months of school. I hope she will be okay and I hope that my dad will get to come back with us. We miss him when he's gone. I have to help my mom and do a lot of things when he is not here. I'll have to help my little sister talk to my cousins. She knows a lot of words in Spanish, but not all of them. My cousins like to talk to me about my school in North Carolina. "They think I'm very smart because I can talk English." They study English in their school too, but their teachers teach them in Spanish, so they don't know how to speak English very much.

Next year I will be in fifth grade. It will be my last year before going to middle school. I hope some of my friends are in my class and I hope I have Mrs. Barnes for my

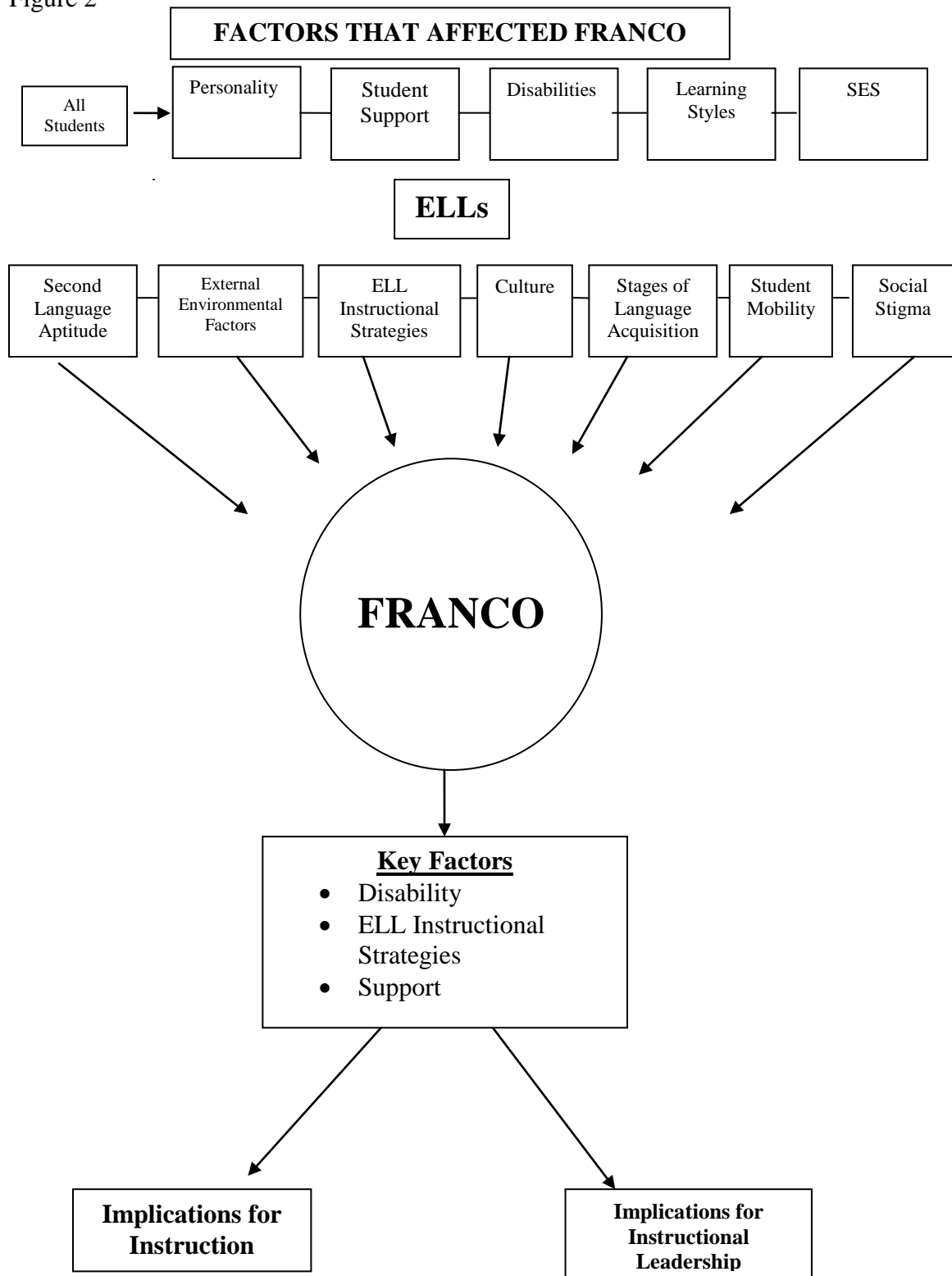
teacher. I've heard she is very nice. I hope I can still see Mrs. Sims next year because she helps me read better. I also hope that Giovanni and Pancho are in my class because we like to play soccer together at recess. "I like school at Elmwood most because I have a lot of friends." My sister will also be at Elmwood in Kindergarten next year, so I'll get to teach her everything about going to school here.

### **Key Factors: Franco**

Key factors that affected Franco's academic and linguistic progress were the lack of understanding and use of ELL instructional strategies, student support, and his disability. Franco's teachers clearly did not receive sufficient training on how to implement appropriate ELL teaching strategies and therefore did not feel equipped to support his second language acquisition adequately. Franco's parents also did not possess the academic or language skills to appropriately support his education at home. Teachers felt as though they did not adequately know how to help the parents understand their role in the education of their child because they did not speak English at home.

Franco's disability was another distinguishing factor that played a key role in his learning and progress, specifically in literacy skills. Starting with Kindergarten and first grade he possessed a significant discrepancy between his reading skills and oral language skills that continued to be more prevalent as he continued through elementary grades. Teachers were unaware of how to adequately meet the needs of an ELL student and therefore did not understand how to distinguish between a language barrier and a learning disability. All of the aforementioned factors were significant in Franco's educational experiences and overall progress.

Figure 2



## **Analysis of Data: Franco**

### **ELL Instructional Strategies**

After interviewing Franco's former teachers and intervention specialists, several themes emerge throughout the data. First, all of Franco's former teachers have said that they have had very little if any formal training from the school district in meeting the needs of English Language Learners. "As far as teaching an ELL student, I have always felt a little insecure about my ability to meet the needs of ELL students because of the language difference. I don't have any training...even with all of my Title I training, it is not enough. We need more specific training." Generalized training on differentiation or literacy training has been much needed in public schools, but although the teachers feel that literacy training is beneficial for all children, this doesn't negate the strong need for specialized training in meeting the needs of ELL students.

Franco's fourth grade teacher stated "I really haven't had that much training in working with ESL students. I did take Spanish in college, but I'm certainly not a conversationalist. I had also worked with first grade in the phonics content, but I was a bit rusty." This teacher's understanding of meeting the needs of English Language Learners seem to consist of speaking their native language and reducing the fourth grade content level to re-teach first grade skills. Teachers lack the understanding of how to make modifications for ELL students without "watering down" the fourth grade content. In addition, many school districts enroll ELL students who speak many different languages, some of whom are multi-lingual students, so the assumption that speaking the student's native language in order to assist them is helpful, but not realistic due to lack of

bilingual and multi-lingual personnel. Franco's first grade teacher stated that "I've had some experience teaching ELL students in my student teaching, but that was the only thing I've had. I've had no other training provided by the district and I have only been teaching four years." In addition, another one of Franco's teacher said that she had taken one course in college that addressed "teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages, but I've had no training from the school or district." In other words, the teachers feel as though they are not sufficiently equipped to meet the needs of ELL students.

According to recent research on Improving Educational Outcomes for English Language Learners, many classroom teachers across the U.S. have not been appropriately trained on how to adequately address the needs of ELL students in their classrooms. "Teachers deserve to be well prepared to deliver their content to their ELL students" (August, D., 2010). In many areas where the population has recently grown, there are larger numbers of classroom teachers who possess little or no training concerning teaching ELL students. "Classroom teachers ...are severely limited in their ability to differentiate classroom instruction or provide additional support to respond to the varying English language and content proficiency levels of their students" (August, Barnett, & Christian, D., 2009, p. 7).

In my opinion having been and ELL teacher, if teachers are not taught how to differentiate for ELL students in the regular classroom, the achievement gap between ELL students and non-ELL students will continue to widen. Perhaps, the comments from Franco's teachers are not all too different from the comments from teachers nationwide, especially in rural areas. I also suspect that administrators also would confess to their not

having had adequate training to lead their staffs in how to appropriately meet the needs of ELL students. According to the Working Group on ELL Policy,

leaders at all levels of the educational system—from mentor teachers to department chairs to principals to district administrators to state department of education officials to teacher educators—must have a deep understanding of ELLs’ needs at different grade levels and a robust repertoire of strategies for meeting those needs (August, Barnett, Christian, 2010, p.11).

School districts must start at the local level to strategize how they will provide teachers with sufficient training so that they will not only understand how to meet the needs of ELL students but that ELL students within the district will succeed and excel at a similar rate to non-ELL students.

### **Disability**

Another distinct theme that emerged from the data was the early signs of discrepancy between Franco’s speaking and reading skills. On one hand he could speak English quite well for his age, and could even translate for his family and friends, but his literacy skills did not progress at an even rate with his speaking. Franco’s mother even stated that,

He can translate very well. When I ask him what a word is in English, he can tell me immediately. He is very motivated to speak English and helps my daughter learn to speak English. So, actually, I don’t understand why reading is so difficult for him because my daughter is already reading [she is five and finishing preschool].

Although this difference could have been due to the daughter having an older sibling to talk with, perhaps the discrepancy between spoken English and reading is due to developmental issues or a potential learning disability? Language acquisition and the rate at which a child learns a second language is affected by a child's personality and environment as well as academic interventions. This "red flag" or unique difference was noted by many of his teachers as well.

His speaking was so different from his reading.

I think he could understand what I was saying, but he struggled to read.

His struggle was more with vocabulary and sounds.

His conversational English is very good...he struggles in reading and writing.

When tested by the school psychologist he possessed a 39 point discrepancy in his reading scores. He scored an average IQ score of 109 and a 70 on the academic reading testing, which created the 39 point significant difference.

That's big, because usually 15 points is considered a significant difference, and he has 39 points...I just don't think that this is all based upon English language problems because the fact that he is speaking and understanding English pretty well, but yet he can't perform reading or writing very well. I do think there is a learning disability going on with him.

Also, to validate his discrepancy between his speaking skills and reading, the school psychologist stated that "you look at his response to intervention too, he has gotten Title



I, this intense intervention and he is still not responding. So, it just seems like it is more than just the Spanish.” “You just kind of put it all together.” It is interesting to note that he did receive Title I intervention in first grade, but then the school lost the Title I program when he was in third grade due to lower percentages of students living in poverty, and then received the program again during his fourth grade year.

Although his teachers concurred that the discrepancy existed, it is interesting to note that the division between his speaking and reading was not as noticeable until second grade. His Kindergarten and first grade teachers made comments like, “I do not remember him struggling. He spoke very fluent English, and acted as an interpreter for one of my other ELL students.” Franco’s first grade teacher stated that he struggled “very little.” “If not on grade level, he was very close and I don’t remember him really struggling.”

Since Franco did not begin to show signs of struggling in reading until second grade, the question becomes, why then? On one hand, the curriculum becomes more literacy intense in first and second grade than in Kindergarten, but he also received less intervention from the English as a Second Language Program as his speaking became more proficient. Both classroom teachers and English as a Second Language teachers felt as though he was progressing because his speaking and vocabulary skills progressed very quickly. He was not labeled early on as a student with a significant learning deficit and therefore some of his teachers felt like the situation would improve with time. “You know, with his ESL situation, we think that is the reason [for his struggle]? I guess we kept thinking that it would get better.”

Although the time factor is supported by research in that it takes students 5-7 and sometimes up to 10 years to gain fluency in reading and writing in a second language, this outlook on ESL student progress, is also somewhat of a “wait to fail” approach if necessary interventions are not adequately put into place early and sustained through the years. The ESL research is important, but the authors were not suggesting that educators simply “wait” for the literacy skills to “arrive” at proficiency through exposure to the language. Teachers must be strategic in order to place interventions into ESL students’ instructional day so that while they are acquiring their second language, they will be sufficiently supported in both their language acquisition and literacy development. It appears from the teacher’s comments that teachers were waiting because they were not aware of what else to do or what strategies to put into place, which probably resulted from their lack of training.

Included in these instructional strategies could also be the use of native language to support early literacy. Franco progressed very appropriately at the same level as his English speaking peers until his second grade year. In pre-school he possessed the strong support of his native Spanish speaking teacher assistant in addition to his English speaking teacher. This resource and use of his native language cushioned and supported his early literacy skills in English through the use of his native language, Spanish. Once he entered public schools, that support was no longer provided at the same frequency and intensity that it was in preschool. “The use of the home language can help promote English language development and academic achievement, particularly in literacy” (August, D., Barnett, S., Christian, D., 2009, p.4). In other words, if Franco (and other

ESL students) had been provided bilingual educational supports through the use of his native language while he was also learning English, he would have been more likely to advance more quickly in his language acquisition and in his literacy skills.

In my own experience teaching ELL students I have witnessed that teachers make the mistake of removing or limiting ESL supports when the student becomes proficient in oral language – speaking. In reality, speaking is only one of the four domains of learning a second language and is also usually the first one to develop. Franco said, “In third grade I only saw my ESL teacher one or two days a week because I could speak English better.” Reading and Writing on the other hand are usually the last areas to develop. They take more time and exposure to develop at a comparable level to the non-ELL student; therefore, ESL teachers and classroom teachers should continue multi-levels of support for ELL students throughout the literacy process even after oral language proficiency is attained in order to ensure literacy success.

I wonder what would have happened in Franco’s literacy learning if he had been provided adequate daily ELL support every year that he struggled in reading, in addition to other reading supports (i.e. Title I...etc.)? It seems as though in retrospect the classroom teachers thought he had an “ELL” problem, the special education teachers felt as though it was a “language” problem and felt it was too soon to refer, and the ESL teachers felt as though it was something more than language – a potential learning disability. I feel as though instead of trying to diagnose Franco’s struggles, teachers in general needed to put preventive interventions in place from the very onset of difficulty. They also appear to have an assumption that either Franco cannot learn or they cannot

teach him, which may be a function of their lack of training or a subtle form of discrimination perpetuated by low expectations. Again, it is a “wait to fail” approach. The interventions needed to be intense and daily in order to track the results instead of reducing levels of services because he was proficient in one area (oral language) but not in the others (reading and writing). Although I understand that school systems are pressured to serve the neediest students in ELL programs due to funding and resource shortages, ELL students benefit more from a preventative approach of sustained intervention and ELL services until they become proficient in all areas of language acquisition – reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

### **Support**

An additional factor in Franco’s data was his level of parental support in his education from Kindergarten through fourth grade. His parents supported him by sending him to pre-school and exposing him to school readiness skills for one year prior to Kindergarten. They also attended school conferences and parental involvement meetings upon request. In addition, they supported him by structuring a time for homework at home and assisting him with his assignments as best they knew how. The key issue with parental support for Franco was that they did not fully understand how to help their child because they themselves were not proficient in the language in which he was being instructed. Franco’s mother stated,

Well, his first year, the truth is, that it didn’t make much sense to me-his progress...in comparison, she (pointing to her 5 year old daughter)...she knows how to speak English and write some in English, whereas Franco could speak only a little English, but didn’t know as much English and could not write in English at her

age. He could only write his name. He didn't know nearly as much as she does when he started school. I thought he would have learned more rapidly.

In other words, Franco's mother noticed a significant difference in her son and daughter's school readiness skills even though they had both attended the same bilingual pre-school. This data perhaps suggests that Franco was struggling with a learning difference early on. His second grade teacher stated the following in relation to parents helping at home: "Well, that's the problem. Most of the ESL students don't have someone at home to speak English and who can help them with homework. They do not have a computer to work on programs like Starfall [internet-based computer program] or things like that." In addition, Franco's mother commented that helping her child with homework was the hardest aspect of his schooling for her as a parent. When asked if the transition to school was hard for her, she said,

Yes, the homework was hard. Right now for instance, my husband is in Mexico and he can read and speak English better and usually can help with Franco's homework. But for me, sometimes I would look or ask for help from someone, but sometimes I would have to do it. So, I would take him when someone could help him with his homework. But, when no one else was able to help him, I would help him.

Franco's mother only finished early high school, so she relied on other sources to help her son with his homework and to provide him with the needed support. It is very admirable that Franco's mother was determined to find help for her son when she realized her own lack of understanding, but many parents are not that determined. Franco's mother [and Franco] would have benefited from family literacy programs as suggested by

research on parental involvement among English Language Learners. “Family literacy projects offer classes for parents in English language and literacy with a focus on promoting parent involvement in their children’s schooling...they assess and acknowledge the language and literacy used at home” (Peregoy, S. & Boyle, O., 1997, p. 160). More often, it is the Hispanic mothers that stay home and are responsible for helping their children with homework, and the fathers are the ones who learn more English because they hear it daily in the workplace. Although this is not always the case, it is in Franco’s case. His mother actually works as well, but does not work the long hours that her husband does, and therefore, has time to care for the children in the afternoons. She has stated “I would like to learn English, but don’t have the time to go to school.” Family literacy projects would help her and many other families if offered at the local school level, because parents receive classes to teach them how to help their children with homework and how to learn basic conversational English that would help them feel more comfortable communicating at school. The issue of parental involvement is significant because it is different that parental involvement for a non-English Language Learner. Struggling readers who are non-English Language Learners can go home and receive help from parents in their native language (English). In other words, parents can practice reading with them in English and ask on-going questions to enhance reading comprehension. Spanish-speaking parents can support their student’s literacy skills by reading in Spanish, but cannot help with vocabulary in English. The basic literacy skills are transferable if the parent has resources to use in their native language and has the literacy knowledge themselves in native language to do so. Often times, this is not the

case with immigrant families. Public schools cannot assume that parents know what to do or have the resources with which to do what their children need. In my past experience parents of students learning English do not have the resources or know what to do to help their children. If schools are truly trying to level the playing field and be preventive with English Language Learners and the programs that serve them, they must offer more learning opportunities for parental involvement and utilize bilingual staff members to present literacy material and literacy family literacy programs in parents' native language.

Family and parental involvement opportunities also assist the school in understanding and learning about cultural differences that exist with English Language Learners. For example, Franco's situation is very typical of Hispanic culture in that the father is the primary one working long hours and the mother is responsible for helping the children with homework and caring for children in the evening. Furthermore, the mother commented that in Mexico, where she is from, the schools are different. "In Mexico, if a student doesn't pass his grade, it is not a problem. And, if there are days when a student doesn't go to school, there is not a problem, no big deal." The culture seems to be much more "laid back" and relaxed where as Americans often interpret this as "not caring" or being as diligent as one should. Franco, whether it is his personality or cultural differences, also exhibits a very care-free, easy-going, mentality. "He is a very happy child and usually doesn't worry too much about school. He cares, but just does the best that he can and doesn't worry about the rest." Perhaps, Franco's personality traits also stem from his cultural upbringing that could possibly affect his language progress.

On one hand, his positive, easy-going personality could contribute to his strong oral language skills because he is not worried about taking language risks in social contexts; therefore, he learned to speak English quickly. On the other hand, he may be delayed with language development because it is more difficult for him and he is not as intentional and assertive as he may need to be in the classroom. By that same notion, teachers must be taught to recognize this difference and capitalize on English Language Learners' strengths in order to help them grow and advance in their language acquisition.

**Description: Jose**

I am Jose and live in Thomasville, North Carolina. My family and I are from San Miguel, Mexico. I currently live here with my father and sister. I have another sister, but she got married and moved out and now "has a life of her own." My mother used to live with us, but on one of our trips back from Mexico, she got stopped at the border and was not allowed to come back to live with us. Since then, my mother has had to stay in Mexico and my father and sisters and I go back to visit her at Christmas and in the summer. It is very hard for me to be away from my mother. She would always take care of me when my father was at work. I stayed with her every day before I went to school. My sisters try to help me like my mother did, but it is not the same. I hope she can come back to live with us soon.

I first came to school at Elmwood Elementary in Kindergarten. I did not go to pre-school or anything before that. I got to stay every day with my mom - I loved it! Kindergarten was fun, but I was nervous when I first came. "I didn't know English, so I



had to listen.” I didn’t know any of my shapes, letters, or colors before coming to school, so I had to learn them in English in Kindergarten. My favorite part about Kindergarten was playing in centers. We got to play with blocks and build things. I got to meet new friends and talk in Spanish and English because several of my friends also knew Spanish in my class. They helped me to feel better about school because they were learning English too. My English teacher worked with me and helped me the most to feel better about school. She also talked with my father and mother about ways to help me at home. She worked with me two times a week. What I didn’t like about Kindergarten was when we had to color or write. I could not see the lines very well when I would color and writing was hard for me too. I wanted to play more with my new friends instead of writing or coloring. My teacher would have to tell me over and over to do my work and finish my writing. It took me a long time to write anything – it was not fun.

The next year, I went to first grade and had Mrs. Nicely as my teacher. She was very nice and tried to help me more in reading and in writing. I got to work with her by myself some instead of just being in a big group with my friends. My English teacher also helped me and I had a special reading teacher who came and got me with a group of my friends everyday to practice reading. I still did not like reading, though, because it was hard for me to see the words and know what they mean. I liked Math a lot better, but sometimes it was hard for me to see the numbers too! My first grade teacher told my dad that the school nurse checked my eyes and said that I needed to go to the eye doctor. So, my dad took me and I got glasses because I couldn’t see well. I did not like wearing my glasses because it made me look different than the other kids. Some days I would forget

and leave them at home. My teachers would call my dad and tell that I needed to bring my glasses to school every day. I did not think that they helped me too much.

Overall, I liked first grade because my mom was with me that year and in Kindergarten. She helped me at home and made me feel better about learning. I love my mom. I miss her very much now that she cannot be here with us. She was always there to help take care of me and to help me feel better when I felt bad. She would cook my favorite meals for me and my sister every week. Our family is just not the same without her. My dad, mom, sister, and I went back to Mexico at the end of my first grade year to visit some of our family, and then we decided to stay there for the next school year so that we could be there with family.

I spent my second grade year in my school in Mexico. We went back to my home town in San Miguel, where my grandmother lives. My school in Mexico was a much smaller school than Elmwood Elementary. My school there was out in the country and only had a few classrooms. We had first and second grades in the same classroom and third and fourth grades in the same classroom to save space. School there was very different. I went to school most every day, except when it was raining, but we got to go home at 12:00 noon. We then went home to take a nap. We didn't have to come back to school after lunch if we were only in second grade. The kids who were in sixth grade or higher would have to come back after lunch and stay in school until 6:00 in the evening. So, "the school day got longer as your grade got higher."

My teacher in second grade spoke Spanish in school and I learned to read and write some in Spanish. She told my parents that I was holding my paper too close to my

face and that I might need glasses. I left my glasses here in North Carolina, so my father asked my sister to send them in the mail so that I could use them in school. I wore my glasses some, but they did not seem to help very much and I didn't like wearing them. My teacher would get mad at me for not wearing them, and then I would get in trouble. I didn't like to read or write in school that year. My grades went down a little too. It was hard for me, especially in Spanish. My dad had to come to school sometimes because my teacher would call him and tell him that I got in trouble. I did not want to do my work because my teacher would get mad at me every day. I couldn't see the board, so she put me in the middle of the room, but my teacher here always puts me at the front of the class. I can see better up there. I like doing things in school that are fun, and my school in Mexico was not very fun for me.

I did like playing at recess and after school with my friends. My favorite part about school in Mexico was playing soccer with my classmates. My friends and I would walk to and from school, and play soccer in the neighborhood after school. On the weekends in Mexico we got to take trips with my family to the mountains and go hiking. It was fun and very pretty there. The best part about these trips was that all of my family got to go together – my mom, dad, sisters, and me. Sometimes, my cousins would even go with us! We would pack food to stay overnight, and we would hike up to the mountains and camp there until the next day.

At the end of second grade, my parents felt like we should come back to North Carolina for my sisters and me to go to school. They felt like we did better in school here than in Mexico. My dad especially wanted me to come back here because he felt like I

got a better education here, and that I did not get in trouble as much as in Mexico. I got better grades here in school than in Mexico. I do like school better here at Hasty because the teachers are nice and we get to do fun things while we learn.

I did not get back from Mexico until two weeks after the school year had already started. When I walked into class, I saw a few of my friends from first grade. They all said “hey, where were you?” I was kind of embarrassed because they said “that they had had fun in second grade when I was in Mexico.” I said, “it was only second grade!” They kind of made me sad at first because I felt like I missed out on something. I was glad to see that some my friends from first grade were there and spoke Spanish just like me. They helped me a lot to understand the teacher. I had forgotten a lot of my English and “it was hard to communicate.” It was like I had to start all over again because I forgot my English. “I do not want to go back to Mexico like that again.” It took me a while to learn English again – it was very hard for me. I would like to go back, but only for short visits, not for long ones. By the end of third grade, I understood better what the teacher said in English. Reading and Writing was still very hard for me in English. In third grade, I had to get new glasses because my doctor said that my eyes were changing. I could not see as well especially when I had to see the board and read small print in a book. “The print is hard for me.” I still did not like wearing my glasses, but they do help me a little when I read now. This year I saw my ESL teacher twice a week where we worked on my speaking English and reading English because I had forgotten so much. My grades improved some this year too – I got mostly Cs and even one B! “I was glad to be back here in school.”

This past year I was in fourth grade in Mrs. Smith's class. This year I made mostly Cs and a few Ds. I don't like reading. Mrs. Smith was very nice, but asked me why I held my papers so close to my face. At first, I forgot my glasses a lot and left them at home, but then I started bringing them every day. Mrs. Smith would call and talk with my dad about how I needed my glasses to do my work. My glasses helped me, but only a little. Mrs. Smith lets me "sit at the front of the room and uses the document camera to make things bigger for me." This helps me see better. Reading was very hard for me this year. Writing was too. I got to work with my reading teacher every day. She helped me feel better because I was in a group of other kids that also needed extra help in reading, so I wasn't the only one – that made me feel better too.

My favorite time during the day in fourth grade was recess, because my friends and I would play soccer outside. I love to play soccer with my friends. My least favorite thing about fourth grade is the homework. It takes me a long time to do homework. Sometimes, my sister helps me, but my dad works a lot. He is not able to help me that much. On my first two report cards, I made Cs and Ds. My father said he thought I could do better. I just don't like reading, because it takes me so long to read a book.

After three or four months in fourth grade, my dad took me back to the doctor. This time, my eye doctor told me that I needed to go to a special doctor in Chapel Hill. This doctor said "that I had Stargart's disease and had little holes in my eye, so I couldn't see well." He also said that this is the same disease that my older sister has – she is 21. It means that every year my eyes will get a little worse and someday I may not be able to see at all. "My doctor and my dad bought me this magna-brite and a little telescope to

help me see things far away.” The magna-brite is a glass dome that I can put over my papers and books and it helps me read them better. “The telescope is for distance.” This year, my teacher also moved me up to the front of the classroom, and that has helped me to see better. My teacher in Mexico sat me in the middle of the classroom, and I could not see the board to read. I did not like school too much there. I like school in North Carolina better than in Mexico. This year I got a new teacher to help me with my tools that help me see better. She comes to visit me on Thursdays for one hour. She tells me that I can do better if I use the tools that dad bought me and that I can learn and do well in fifth grade if I keep trying. This year I passed my Math EOG (End of Grade test), but did not pass my Reading. My teacher said that I did not have to retake it. My father talked with the principal and she said that I would be able to go on to fifth grade next year.

This summer, I am going to Mexico to visit my mom. I really miss her. My father is writing letters to immigration to ask for a waiver so that she will be able to come back with us and live with us again here in North Carolina. I know it is hard for my dad because he has to work two jobs, and my sister has to help me like my mom did. I can’t wait to see her again. She will be surprised how much I have grown! My mom wants me to stay here and get a good education, so I can get a good job one day. She said that she did not get to go to school for very long in Mexico when she was little, and she wants a better life for me.

**Key Factors: Jose**

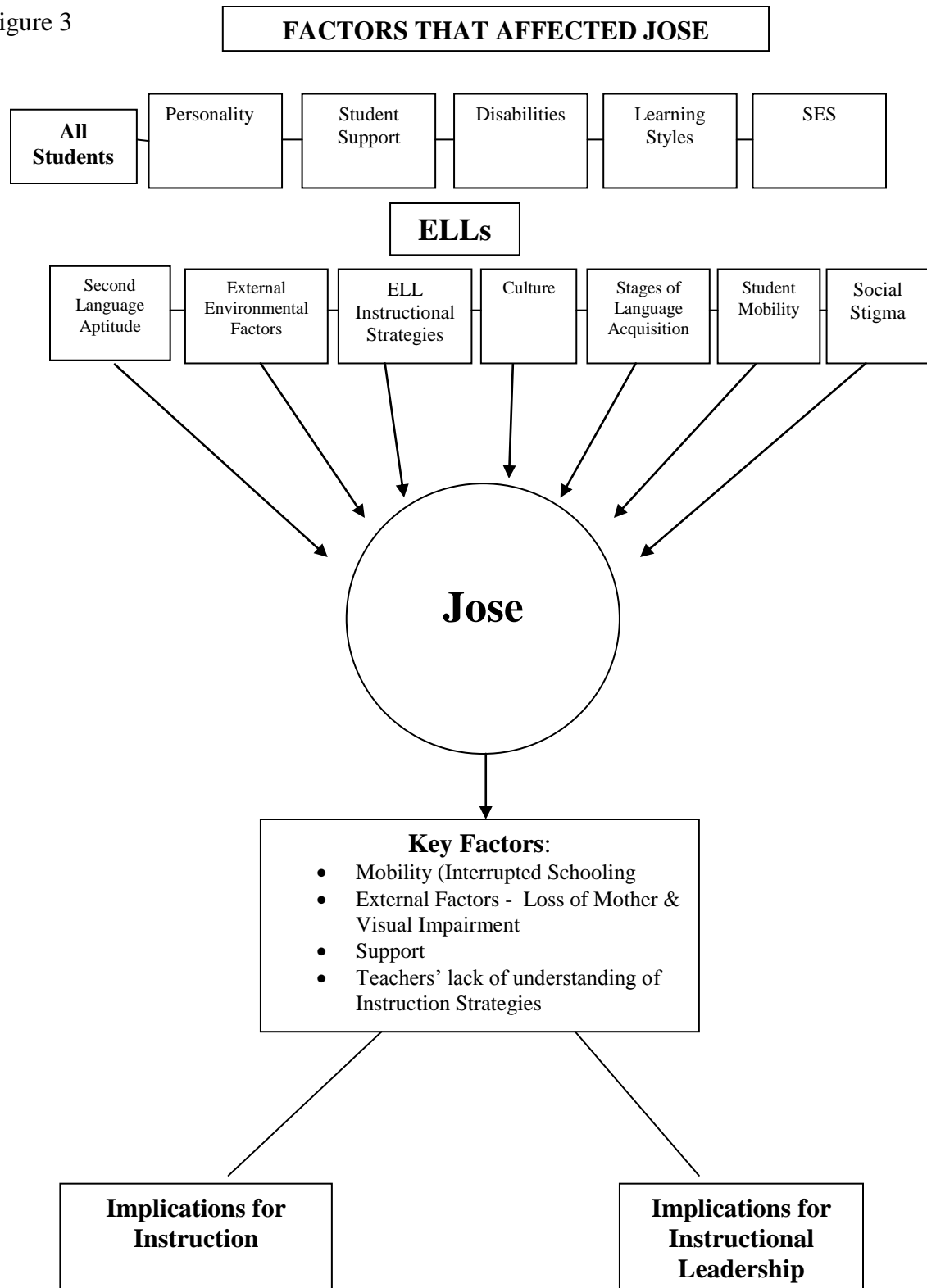
Key factors that played a significant role in Jose’s overall progress and educational experience were his mobility issues (interrupted schooling), external factors

such as loss of his mother and visual impairment (disability), support, and teachers' lack of understanding of ELL instructional strategies. When Jose had to leave after first grade to spend his second grade year in Mexico, his education was "interrupted" both academically and linguistically.

He moved back into a Spanish speaking environment and forgot much of the English that he had learned. Jose's father also felt that the content in second grade in Mexico also seemed to be less rigorous than second grade content at Elmwood Elementary. Jose struggled with behavioral issues in Mexico that seemed to derive from his overall lack of motivation and frustration that came primarily from his visual impairment.

Another key factor was lack of parental support due to the fact that his mother was not allowed to return to North Carolina with the family due to immigration issues. Jose's father then had to fill both the roles of mother and father and try to financially support his family of three children. In short, he possessed very little time and knowledge of how to support his children academically, specifically in English. His mother's absence and lack of parental support significantly played a role in Jose's motivation and desire to achieve in school.

Figure 3





### **Analysis of Data: Jose**

In analyzing the themes from the data gathered from Jose's teachers and parents, the common themes among the research consist of student mobility/interrupted schooling issues, external factors such as visual impairment (disability) and loss of his mother, lack of motivation, and parental support.

#### **Student Mobility**

First, Jose's father addressed his issue of interrupted schooling as being very significant.

He (Jose) learned to speak English fairly quickly, mostly in one year. Then, he forgot everything in English he had learned in one year (when he was in Mexico) – almost completely...thank God we returned when he was in third grade, and he learned English again. It took about another year for him to learn how to speak and understand English again.

In other words, the transition from English to Spanish-speaking school environment was so difficult that he did not gain the in-depth content knowledge that he needed in either language. In the process, he forgot much of his English vocabulary. In talking about his experience leaving U.S. schools and returning to Mexico to attend school he said,

Well, I don't want to go back again...my friends asked me where I was. They said they had fun in second grade. This transition was not only difficult for Jose academically due to interruptions in content knowledge, but it also seems to have been difficult emotionally as well. It made me sad that I had been away from my friends.

He acknowledged his "interruption" also in his social interactions and relations with his friends that made him want to continue his education here.

### **External Factors (Loss of a Mother)**

During the transition from Mexico back to the U.S., Jose's father stated that his mother was not able to return due to immigration issues, and Jose suffered emotionally from her absence potentially contributing to his lack of motivation. Jose's father described his emotional suffering as having an effect on his motivation:

I think he misses his mother which contributes to his lack of motivation. He just doesn't like to read, and that's a big part of his problem. He is not very interested in reading. Every time when he does his homework, he really doesn't like doing his reading at all.

This comment is significant because it shows Jose's father's realization of his lack of motivation in reading and directly relates it to his emotions and missing his mother. It is very logical that a student's self-esteem and anxiety from missing his mother could affect his motivation and progress in all academic areas.

In addition, his Kindergarten teacher stated that "at first, he really didn't like school and would go home and try to stay home. He wanted to be with his mother. He loves his mother!" Jose's fourth grade teacher also commented that "he really doesn't apply himself in the classroom, and mom is not here, and I'm not sure how much of a factor that is. I'm sure it would make a difference." It is interesting to note that his lack of motivation increased after second grade, when his mother was not able to return to live with them in North Carolina. It is evident that she was a supportive and loving figure in Jose's life. Jose's father framed the potential effect of this separation in the following statement:

Maybe the principle issue here is not having his mother here because his older sister who has the same disease did not have any of these learning problems and she had her mother with her through her younger years when she was in school. The vision problem was the same.

Although the two children possess the same disease, perhaps issues of gender make Jose's situation more complex, or perhaps there exists a difference in resiliency between the personalities of Jose and his older sister? Why is this separation so significant?

Based upon the data, it seems as though Jose drew direct strength and confidence from the stability of his mother's presence. Perhaps, this was more due to the fact that he was the youngest child in the family, and also due to the fact that he was the only male child?

Although correlations are not directly conclusive from the data, it is possible that they are strongly related. It is significant because the data shows evidence that her absence has affected his attitude and motivation toward his education especially since she has been absent from the home.

This separation limited Jose's mother's ability in being involved in his education and placed additional stress on Jose's father and on the family. Jose's father commented that, "it is difficult for Jose because at home we speak more Spanish than here at school. It is difficult for Latino parents to help their children at home." Although Jose's mother didn't speak much English, she would structure a time and place for homework every day, and make sure that Jose completed his homework. What she could not help him with, she would ask for assistance from Jose's sisters. Jose's father clearly had to assume both responsibilities, of mother and father, once she could not return. This added stress is very significant because the family was clearly functioning in a state of survival and

Jose's emotional needs were not fully being met, which in turn could have contributed to his lack of motivation and self-confidence.

### **Personality - Lack of Motivation**

When asked specifically about the children's transition to school in the U.S, the father stated that "my children didn't speak any English (at first) and they didn't have any real desire to go to school. Then, they began to understand more on the streets and in the neighborhood than they could in the school." It is very interesting to note that the father realized that the transition did indeed affect the motivation levels of all three of his children, but that with continued exposure and acclimation, they became more acclimated to the culture. Yet even with continued exposure and acclimation, Jose still lacked motivation at school, whereas his sisters seemed to improve with time.

Even at a very young age, the data seems to indicate that Jose was never highly motivated academically. The question still exists as to whether it was a part of his personality, his own ability, his frustration, his sight, or the eventual loss of his mother's presence with him in the home? Jose's Kindergarten teacher stated that "anything that involved coloring, he had no interest in drawing, writing, or coloring. Part of the time I wasn't sure if he understood what I was saying or what. A lot of times I didn't know if it was just a laziness side or if he just couldn't do it. It was kind of a fine line when you are working with a child with a language difference and then maybe a disability." Now that the data shows us that he has a degenerative eye disease, it makes one wonder if his lack of motivation for writing and reading stems from his visual impairment and him simply being frustrated because he couldn't see to complete the task.

### **External Factors - Visual Impairment (Disability)**

Another unique theme in the data was Jose's visual struggles even years before he was officially diagnosed. "He had trouble decoding and reading. This was when I recommended getting his eye checked and that he needed to get glasses. I can't remember if it was because of money or just not knowing what to do, but he did not hardly ever have his glasses." This comment was made by his first grade teacher who thought mostly that his struggle was due to the language barrier. "At that point I would say his issues were due to the language barrier. I did not see that vision was a major problem for him." For many teachers, they assumed that his academic performance was delayed due to the language barrier, whereas in reality the language barrier was only one of several factors affecting his progress.

I think that Jose was misunderstood. I thought, well, yes, he is LEP (limited English proficient) and of course he is further behind than his regular classmates, he's had interrupted schooling, but the moment that he was able to see, his reading level shot through the roof and he was immediately able to read more grade appropriate text verses text on a first grade level. So, I thought, well, he CAN read, he just hasn't been able to see! That makes sense.

In other words, the teacher than was able to truly gain an understanding of his true reading level with corrected vision. Teachers were confused and did not realize how serious his visual impairment was even at the first and second grade level. According to the school psychologist,

It is a major detriment. If he was seeing at a 20/70 in Kindergarten and first grade, then right then, the Visually Impaired Specialist should have been brought in and I should have been testing him

and he should have been classified as VI...especially if he had an academic need as well. So, that is kind of scary. It is nobody's fault, but we just want to alert people as to what to look for in the vision. It really matters if you think about going through life without seeing. It really matters!

The school psychologist makes a crucial point that teachers need to know what to look for in students who may have vision problems. All disabilities do not look the same. Sensory impairments such as hearing and visually impaired students may progress and act very differently than a learning disabled child. Much like the lack of training for ELL students, teachers also need to be taught and reminded yearly about what to look for in children with potential sensory impairments (i.e. visual and hearing) in addition to more typical learning disabilities. In the case of Jose, if his Kindergarten, first, and second grade teachers had known how to be more proactive and known what to look for, perhaps Jose's visual impairment would have been noticed sooner and would have been diagnosed earlier. "Right off the bat when he goes to school, he really was not seeing well. Each year it eventually got worse and worse until now it is 20/300 (with corrective lenses). So yes, he couldn't see as a rule." Although, he has a degenerative eye disease, he could have been receiving extra services through the Visually Impaired Specialist early on, and he could have also been using his specialized eye devices to aid him in reading and writing – two areas in which he has struggled for several years.

Although his visual tools help him to a certain degree, he still is not like a typical struggling reader due to the manner in which he is able to read text.

When you think about using his tools, he still cannot see the whole entire paragraph whereas most children can. He is still at a

disadvantage because he has to read word for word. Other readers can glance at the whole page of text. They can see pictures and text features, all that, and when he scrolls through with his magnabrite, he can only read single words.

In other words, even with the use of the visual tools, the “playing field” is not totally leveled for Jose. His disability still exists despite interventions and much-needed tools. He needed to be taught from an early age how to survive, learn, and grow despite the disability although he may never see in the way that other children do. Vision clearly is a strong contributing factor to his academic struggles.

Jose’s vision and second language issues continued to affect his motivation even in the last two years and continues to be a primary concern for his teachers even in fourth grade. “I feel like he has gotten into this mentality that he is too cool for school. He does not like to be in the spotlight. He doesn’t like to use all of those instruments that he has been given, so in a sense, he is sabotaging his own success.” This teacher and many of his other teachers feel as though his success is based upon his choice at this point in his education. Choice can certainly be part of any student’s success, but it is also deeply affected by factors in one’s background experiences. It seems as though he resents being singled out and being considered different from his classmates. This past year in fourth grade his reading teacher stated the following:

His vision problems definitely impact his learning, especially when it comes to reading things that are too difficult for him. I think that he has developed a lot of learned habits because he is so used to not being able to see and now that he has the tools that he can adjust and make his own modifications, he often doesn’t use his strategies.

These comments from Jose's reading specialist suggest that Jose's motivation may be related to these "learned habits" of not trying because he is not able to see. This teacher also stated that she found Jose to be "very bright." "I'm not sure if it is mainly the vision that is truly impeding his learning at this point or if it is some of his learned behaviors of not trying because he doesn't feel like he can do it." Perhaps this ongoing frustration is a direct result of living so many years with a low self-esteem due to not being able to understand the language and see appropriately. It is logical that many of years of academic frustration would affect one's self-esteem and self-confidence in reading. Maybe his frustration is also due to the absence of his mother? There is certainly a complexity in the data that leads one to believe that there is more than one direct reason for his struggles; it seems to be a combination of things that contribute to his frustrations. When asked about Jose's combination of frustrations, and how the school psychologist felt about his ability, she commented:

I get the feeling of a learning disability, not just a language difference because if it were just a language barrier or a visual impairment, the language proficiency testing would be lower. Yet, you get these peaks in his scores where his oral scores are really high and his reading is low. Usually ESL kids do develop their reading and writing skills in addition to their speaking and listening skills. And I don't know how much if any of this is causing it. But, it is all coming into play. I think that the English language issue is the least thing affecting him at this point.

Since it is unethical to give a visually impaired student an IQ test due to the fact they would be compared to students who have been able to see all of their lives, she explained that she could obtain a fairly accurate idea of his ability through the educational testing that she completed with Jose. Overall, it seems that his vision is the most significant

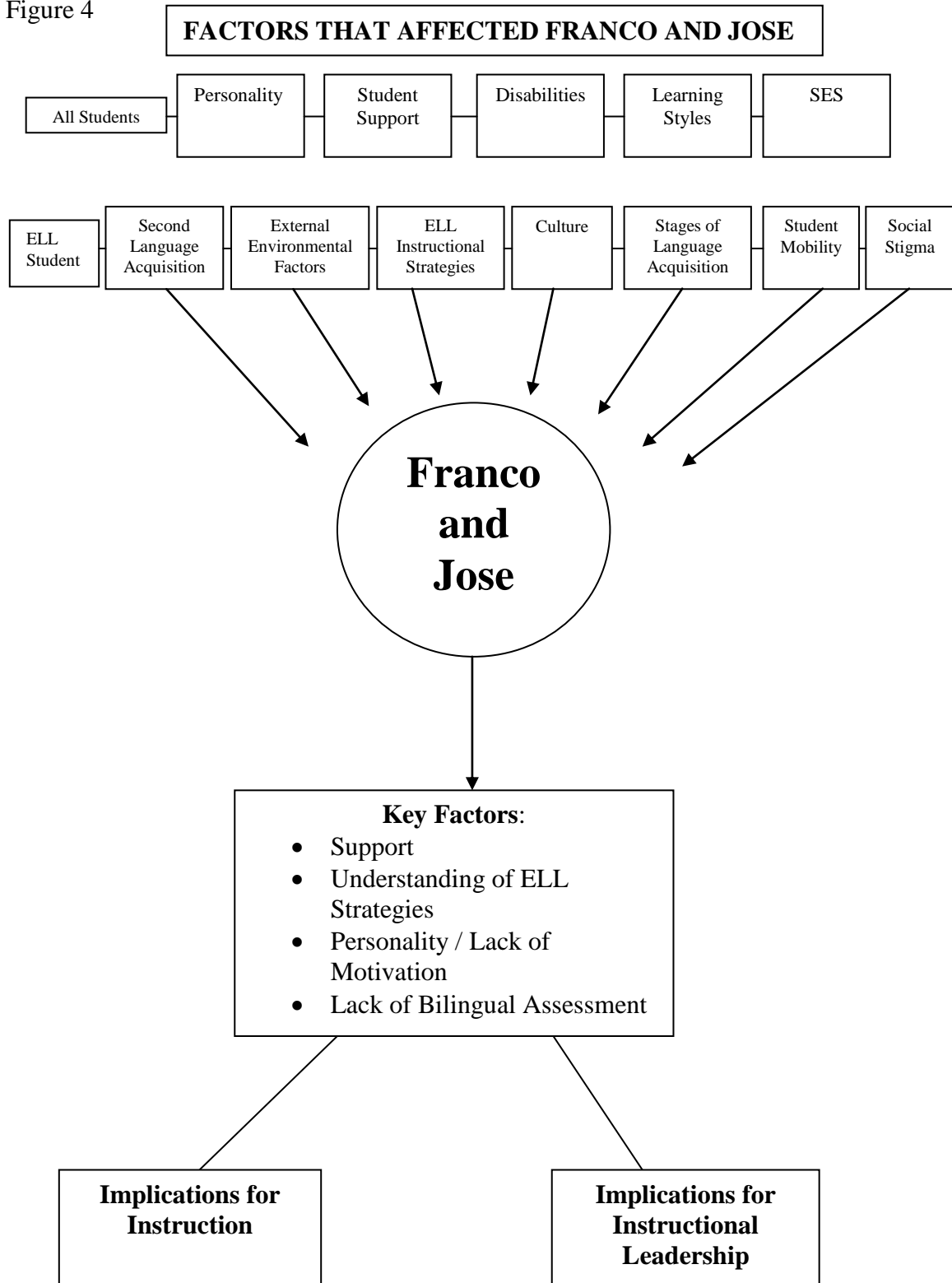


factor affecting his learning at this point, but many other factors exist to contribute to underlying factors.

**Key Factors: Cross-Analysis: Franco and Jose**

Although many factors of both Franco and Jose are very different, the key factors that they have in common that are most significant are the factors of *support and understanding of ELL Instructional Strategies*. Both students and families needed more support from the school by means of teaching them how to assist their children at home. Teachers needed more support from English Language specialists on how to accommodate and support instruction for English Language Learners using specific, research-based ELL instructional strategies. In order to support parents and students, teacher must first receive the appropriate training and instruction on what ELL instructional strategies are and how to incorporate them into their daily instruction.

Figure 4



### **ELL Instructional Strategies**

It is apparent from analyzing both individual student cases, that the teachers by in large felt as though they needed specific training in ELL Instructional Strategies in order to adequately meet the needs of their English Language Learners. One teacher made the following comment about teachers in the district:

I don't think they [teachers] feel prepared to teach ELL students, because we just haven't done a good job of providing workshops [and teaching strategies] for the teachers of these students. I'm hoping that next year things will start to change. As far as the district level goes, we really haven't offered anything. In fact, I know that we haven't offered anything. We've offered a few isolated trainings at individual schools, but it has been just very general and nothing specific about how to work with these students.

Overall, all (16) of the teachers interviewed for this study stated in their own words that they have not received sufficient training on ELL Instructional Strategies from the district or elsewhere to help them to feel competent or prepared to teach English Language Learners in their classrooms. One veteran teacher expressed her concern in the following way:

I think as classroom teachers, we need more training and more resources. It is sad, and I know that I graduated from college in 1982, and I don't know how they do it now, but I had to get my Master's degree to even have a whole course on it – ESL. So, it talked about respecting cultures and background knowledge. But, it is still not enough...It would be good to have someone (ESL) coming into the classroom to work with him and to help show me how to help him, resource, you know what else I can do. I think that the resources are lacking.

Both the length of the aforementioned statement and the explicit detail demonstrate that the teachers yearn for additional training. They need ELL tools first, so that they can

then begin to understand how to distinguish between a true language barrier and a specific learning disability. “Teachers need training in understanding the interaction between learning and context, avoiding the deficit model...” (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008). In other words, teachers need to be explicitly taught ELL strategies to use within their classroom context in order to make language learning more meaningful to students; therefore, they will be able to see more clearly what English Language Learners *can* do instead of dwelling on what English Language Learners *cannot* do. Once they are able to discern what English Language Learners can do, they can use the information learned from their training to know how to plan their instruction accordingly and also how to advocate for additional support if they suspect their student also possesses a disability that hinders their academic performance.

### **Personality - Lack of Motivation**

In addition, both student cases possessed motivational issues that are reflective of their personalities that hindered their academic progress. For example, Franco’s mothers stated,

You see, he is a lazy reader. He doesn’t like to read and when he has reading homework, I have to stand over him and keep telling him, like “OK son, keep going,” but in Math he does his homework on his own. He is motivated in Math, but in reading, he gets lazy and doesn’t like to do his homework. When I sit with him and make him do his reading, he pays attention and does it, but if I don’t sit with him, he just sits there and doesn’t want to do anything on his own.

Similarly, one of Jose’s teachers stated that he “doesn’t apply himself in the classroom...he doesn’t put forth a lot of effort.” These comments signify that both students clearly continue to have issues with motivation related to the content areas in

which they are deficient. The question now becomes, has their motivation been affected by the decrease in their self-esteem that has been caused by their frustration and under-recognized disability?

It is also interesting, but not surprising, to note that both students struggle in the area of reading. The difference is that one student struggles due to a vision impairment and/or language barrier, and the other due to a decoding problem maybe related to the language barrier and/or a disability. Deficits in reading are not surprising for English Language Learners because it takes most student 5-7 years and sometimes up to 10 years to acquire an academic vocabulary equal to that of a native English speaker. Jose is now in his fourth year in U.S schools and Franco is in his fifth year. Their reading skills and language acquisition are still developing.

### **Lack of Bilingual Assessment**

An interesting aspect of the research in both student cases is that both students were assessed by a monolingual school psychologist. When asked if a bilingual psychologist was needed, the following statement was made:

No, the only time I would use a bilingual psychologist is if their speaking and listening skills were not proficient. Like if they were a new student. You must look at the English proficiency scores –they are key...if it's just the academic areas that show that they are low, then that is key.

As a former ESL teacher, I understand this rationale because both students scored higher levels of proficiency on the speaking and listening portions of their English Language Proficiency assessments. The psychologist did administer two non-verbal tests to obtain

an IQ score for Franco “because we don’t want to take a change on the scores being lower due to the language difference.” I also understand the reality that bilingual individuals are sparse and very costly at a time in history where funds are very limited. Nevertheless, according to research, when at all possible, bilingual students should be given a psychological evaluation and academic testing bilingually to ensure that a student is accurately tested and an appropriate diagnosis is made. Schools must be careful not to over-identify ELL students for specialized educational services nor under-identify ELL students. Administering testing through a bilingual psychologist relinquishes any doubt of a student performing poorly due to a lack of understanding of the English language. According to new recommendations for meeting the needs of ELL students nationwide, school districts need to “use funds to hire more psychologists to work with assessment and support of these students in their first language” (August, & Barnett, 2009, p. 9). Assessing students bilingually also ensures that schools receive an accurate picture of their abilities in both languages and provides comparative data. Many evaluative instruments are available in Spanish to assist with meeting the needs of Spanish speaking students like Jose and Franco. To ensure validity, I feel that schools must ensure that bilingual individuals are the ones administering the assessments and interpreting the assessment data to the academic referral team and the students’ parents.

Using bilingual specialists also helps to mitigate anxiety for both English Language Learners and teachers. It is very interesting to note that both students throughout their educational experiences seemed to have been affected by differentiating levels of anxiety coupled with their language learning. For Franco, it seems to have been

more the typical ELL situation of feeling anxious about speaking English in a foreign environment at first. Then, as his language progressed, he became more anxious about his inability to decode text accurately – all of which could possibly contribute to a lower self-esteem. Jose on the other hand, was even more affected by anxiety because he not only experienced the natural feelings of being different and learning a new language in a foreign environment, but he had to experience it twice – initially and upon reentry after second grade. Additionally, the stress and separation anxiety of not having his mother here to support him in his education is suspected to have had significant effects on his learning. According to research, anxiety and stress are common effects of learning a new language and can have negative effects and even halt the language acquisition process for some students (Krashen, S., 1985, p. 51). In a recent study by researcher Renee Von Worde, numerous second language students testified to having “mental and physical manifestations of anxiety as well as internalized reactions” to culture shock and language learning (2003).

In my experience, I too have witnessed students react in similar ways. Some ELL students simply fall asleep in class due to fatigue and anxiety, others simply do not try to apply themselves, and others even get angry at times and cause behavior problems. Although behavior issues are usually minimal, it is interesting how the anxiety that can come from second language learning can manifest itself differently in different children. Perhaps, the lack of motivation issues possessed by both Jose and Franco, are direct results of years of high anxiety and low self-esteem that came from frustrations with learning a new language in a new culture.

Overall, it is quite remarkable that both students are as resilient as they seem to be in the face of so much frustration. The reading struggles are similar for Franco and Jose, but the reasons why they struggle are different. Jose especially has shown incredible resilience as he has been visually impaired since Kindergarten and has been under diagnosed. “It’s amazing to me that he’s not more that way [frustrated]...he seems very positive about everything.” What does this level of frustration do to a child’s development? What does it do to one’s self esteem? Have the students become more or less resilient in the face of their adversity and struggles?



## **Chapter V**

### **Implications and Conclusions**

As an educational researcher, administrator, and former English as a Second Language teacher, I am concerned for today's classroom teachers because I have witnessed the frustration of not knowing how to meet the needs of English Language Learners. In many rural districts especially where the ELL population is steadily growing, teachers need to know how to change appropriately with the population, but haven't been given the necessary tools. In more urban districts, they have had an increased amount of student diversity in the form of English Language Learners for several years and have been provided more training out of academic necessity and the effect of sanctions under Title I and Title III Federal Programs. In my opinion, a more proactive approach needs to be employed specifically in rural districts not only to offset teacher and student frustration, but also to increase the overall student achievement of students learning English. Teachers must be taught proactive strategies on how to increase student learning for English Language Learners, and also how to decrease the anxiety that may be felt by the student as they strive to become proficient in their second language.

#### **Participants' Perceptions of Struggles and Educational Experiences**

Both Franco and Jose possess an in-depth understanding of their own educational experiences. For Franco, he felt as though he had significant challenges learning English

and that it continues to be difficult, but overall he is very appreciative of the help he has been given. He possesses very positive relationships with his former teachers. Franco understands that his most significant struggle at the present time continues to be reading. He acknowledges that reading is hard for him and is his least favorite subject. Jose, on the other hand, continues to struggle in his overall motivation for learning. He seems to understand clearly that reading continues to be difficult for him due to his visual impairment. Although he reflected about his initial struggles learning English, he currently feels as though reading is his most difficult subject due to not being able to see all of the text on the page. Jose openly admits to not being motivated because reading continues to be very difficult for him.

### **Individual Perceptions of Factors Affecting Student Progress**

#### **Students**

The student participants in this study both seem to understand that learning English has been difficult for them due to multiple factors. Franco understands that reading is difficult because he simply needs extra help to be successful. Jose understands that academics are difficult for him due to his visual impairment. Although both students have experienced significant struggles, they both continue to be very resilient and content in their educational setting.

#### **Parents**

Both Franco and Jose's parents do not fault the school officials or teachers for any lack of training or lack of implementing appropriate instructional strategies. The parents are very thankful for being able to attend school at Elmwood Elementary primarily

because it is a much safer and positive environment that they possessed in their home countries. Although both participants continue to need multiple interventions, Franco and Jose's parents acknowledged that their education here in the U.S. is a much higher quality than they would otherwise receive if they had not moved to the U.S. Both sets of parents also feel as though they do not know how to significantly help their children at home academically. They both desire additional resources and understanding of how to assist their children with homework. The most significant difference between the perceptions of Franco's parents and Jose's parents is that Jose's father felt strongly that the loss of his mother contributed greatly to Jose's lack of motivation.

From interviews with parents, I learned specifically that they struggled with underlying issues that created a more challenging educational experience for their children than I had initially expected. For Franco, I learned that he lives with continual pressure of being the "man of the household" when his father is gone back and forth to Mexico to visit relatives. He carries this burden in addition to his struggle with a learning disability and language barrier. Jose, on the other hand, not only struggled with the language barrier and visual impairment, but also struggled with the loss of his mother when she was not allowed to return with the family to North Carolina. These examples illustrate how much as educators we do not initially see the depth of what our students are experiencing as they strive to learn language and content in a new setting.

It is interesting to note that the parents both seem to be very supportive of the school even with the struggles that both students possess. They are quick to say that they are happy with the school and that the school is doing what it needs to in order to help

their child appropriately. It seems as though the parents are so appreciative of being able to attend school here in the U.S. that they do not know or consider advocating for themselves as minorities or as students who may need additional services. It is my newfound understanding that maintaining this type of attitude is a part of their culture. In other words, they support the school and their child wholeheartedly, but do not challenge the system. They need additional resources on how to advocate for themselves and their children in an English speaking environment.

### **Teachers**

From the interviews with teachers, I specifically learned that teachers truly desire more training in the areas of cultural diversity and ELL strategies. As an ELL teacher, I often worked with classroom teachers who wanted the “quick fix” answer and often viewed adjusting instruction as “one more thing.” However, in this study, I found that teachers are actually starved for understanding and training on how to meet the needs of English Language Learners. They desperately need practical strategies to apply daily in their classroom that will make their content more comprehensible for their students. They clearly see the population changing, and acknowledge the lack of preparation both at the school level and district level that is needed to accommodate the change. After having interviewed these teachers, I now understand more fully their classroom teacher perspective and their need for more practical, user-friendly ELL strategies.

The teachers’ perceptions in this study all clearly recognize that their lack of training has contributed to their feelings of ill-preparedness and overall lack of success of these English Language Learners. They feel that they need additional training and also

the services of additional ELL specialists in order to advance the learning of English Language Learners.

If teachers do not have appropriate ELL training of Instructional Strategies, then it becomes even more difficult for them to distinguish between concerns of language barriers and disabilities. I feel that the two students were very misunderstood by their teachers and by me, one of their former ESL teachers. As an ELL specialist, I taught many students who struggled with reading due to language acquisition; I too, failed to view their situations as very different until this last year when the discrepancy between oral language and literacy skills became so pervasive.

I believe it took me stepping out of working as an ELL teacher to truly see the error of my own practices plus the practices of many ELL departments. Not only do many English Language Learners struggle with reading, but many students are underserved due to budget cuts. Even though students become proficient in speaking and listening, they need additional time (sometimes years with support) to become equally as proficient in reading and writing. Teachers are forced to group children in larger groups than normal and are forced to reduce the number of days of services just to be sure to see and serve all of the children that qualify for ELL services. This translates into the intermediate and advanced level students not receiving sufficient support to ensure that they continue to learn the academic, content level vocabulary that they will need to be successful in the regular classroom. Although at the time I felt as though I managed my overall caseload of ELL students as best I could, considering schools that I served, I realize now that individual students needed more intervention than I was able to provide.

Based upon my experience and best practices, ELL students need consistent research-based intervention every day by both their classroom teachers and a trained, ELL specialist.

By completing this on the two student cases, I have been positively affected because I have had the opportunity to gain insight into the lives of two students who are incredibly resilient despite their language differences and their personal and academic struggles. It is amazing to me how they have not become behavior problems or struggled with motivation more than they have. The families and teachers have impacted my life personally and professionally because they have willingly allowed me to listen to their stories, to see their view points, and to understand their struggles. Their stories become personal to me because I too lived overseas as a child and can understand firsthand what it feels like to attend school in a culture different from your own and learn a language that seems foreign at first. I have realized that these families came here to provide a better life for their families than what they experienced as a child. In many ways, they are functioning in a state of survival, and need additional resources on how to support their child. They are doing all that they can and know how to do to help their child succeed in school even amidst their own language barrier as parents.

I've also learned that over time the feeling of "lacking preparation" to teach English Language Learners affects overall teacher moral and a feeling of competency, which in turn affects student performance and achievement. Leaders of school systems must realize that training must be provided in order for teachers to develop appropriate

skills to teach the children of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Not only do they learn differently, but they speak different languages. .

The “system” in general, being public school districts with growing populations of English Language Learners, is one that has not had to be sensitive to linguistic and cultural diversity in many years. As the population grows, school systems must become sensitive to the growing linguistic and cultural diversity and teach their employees how to be proactive and support the learning needs of ELL students. Demonstrating cultural and linguistic sensitivity consists of a multitude of actions such as encouraging native-language use, planning culturally diverse curriculum, and modifying and adapting lessons in order to be responsive to diverse cultures (Echevarria, J., & Graves, A., 2007, p. 124).

The data in this particular study seems to indicate a somewhat “elitist” mentality because it appears that English Language Learners and the teachers who teach them may not receive enough instructional support. The issue of support is not meant to be anyone’s fault, but should be an awakening to the realization that this group of children’s needs is not being met in traditional ways. In other words, they will not fit into a traditional “English only” mold where parents and students are not encouraged to speak Spanish or their native language. As research supports, the students and their parents must be encouraged to preserve their native language and use it as a tool in learning their second language. Native language is a part of their identity and self-image. It is a part of who they are as individuals. If schools are going to teach students 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, we must include teaching all children to be sensitive to linguistic and cultural diversity of other populations.

Overall, I feel the data from this study calls for a more preventive approach to meeting the needs of English Language Learners who are also students with disabilities. The fact that it took both students, Jose and Franco, being in English-Speaking schools four and five years struggling, for them to receive the needed interventions and services is alarming. An approach, such as Response to Intervention “RtI” in which students are given immediate and intense interventions at the very on-set of struggles is warranted if public schools are going to meet the needs of English Language Learners. Using an approach such as RtI, the interventions are continued everyday at different levels (tiers) for a period time and then students are assessed to see their overall response to the intervention provided. If needed, the interventions are continued or discontinued depending upon the level of student need at the time. RtI is “being seen as a more effective process than more traditional approaches, which involve either waiting for a student to fail before intervening or identifying a potential need for special education services, then testing, determining eligibility, and placing the student” (Echevarria, J., & Hasbrouck, J., & Hasbrouck, G., 2009, p. 1). In other words, using a preventive approach will omit the step of special education for some children because interventions were implemented early on and consistently, and for others it may validate the need for participation in specialized education. Teachers must be taught to search, investigate, and implement ELL interventions rather than looking for disabilities (Echevarria, J., Vogt, M., Short, D. 2008, p. 197). Even within a preventive, RtI model, specific ELL strategies must be used in order for the students to receive maximum benefit from academic interventions.



The field of English Language Learners who also possess disabilities is a topic that has not been researched extensively and continues to be a growing concern as the population in the United States continues to change. I feel that this particular study is unique because it has revealed the progress of language acquisition in two students who are English Language Learners yet possess two different disabilities – Franco, a learning disability in reading, and Jose, visual impairment.

As the population of English Language Learners grows, schools will continue to encounter the need for educators and programs that serve students with whom English is a second language who are also students with disabilities. Although the cases in this study represent two students' stories, these two students now occupy two and potentially three different subgroups under No Child Left Behind standards – Limited English Proficient (LEP), Students with Disabilities (SWD), and Economically Disadvantaged (ED). It is critical, now more than ever, that administrators take appropriate action to support the growth of their teachers in strategies that will meet the diverse needs of these students. Administrators face not only an ethical and moral obligation to meet student needs, but they also face the legal obligation to ensure that all subgroups of children meet proficient standards, otherwise facing sanctions under Title I and Title III.

During the year 2009-2010, the district in which this study took place, offered professional development opportunities for regular classroom teachers at three out of thirty-two schools in the district for teachers seeking to learn practical strategies for students learning English. At the individual site where the research took place, the staff received no formal staff development for meeting the needs of English Language

Learners during 2009-2010, but had received one session of professional development on Strategies for English Language Learners two years prior.

In the individual school research site, the newfound data has changed the current professional development plan for the near future. For the school year 2010-2011, as school administrators, we have planned for on-going staff development in the area of English as a Second Language. As administrators, we have been informed by the data through teacher voices that they need additional in-service training on how to meet the needs of ELL students. They also need continual staff development on the importance of early intervention practices in order to support student needs adequately before referral to specialized education programs. Additionally, after students are given sufficient support, teachers will receive appropriate training on how best to distinguish and serve the needs of children who qualify for both programs of service – ELL and Special Education. Realizing that this is an area of research that is still fairly new, there will continue to be a need to revisit these concepts yearly. Therefore, staff development is a large area of need and significant lesson that has been learned from the aforementioned research.

Plan for increased parental involvement & support sessions are in order in the future as the school research-site continues to look for ways to reach out and educate the parents of their English Language Learners. Teachers are looking for ways to work creatively with other programs such as Title I and Exceptional Children's program in offering joint parental involvement meetings with bilingual resources available. The data continues to show the on-going need for bilingual personnel in schools with ELL populations and high numbers of bilingual/multi-lingual children.

A smaller, yet still significant lesson that I have learned, is that all English Language Learners are not created equally. Just as every individual student exhibits their own different learning styles, strengths and weakness, English Language Learners also are very different from one another. Not only do they speak different languages, but they also are strong in certain subjects and weak in others. They also occasionally possess more significant differences that include disabilities. In other words, even within the large category of “ELL” many potential sub-categories exists of which educators must be aware in order to adequately plan necessary steps for their instruction.

As educators and administrators, we must remember that even after receiving appropriate training, there is still not a “one size fits all” solution or remedy to one’s instructional struggles. The same philosophy exists with English Language Learners as students with disabilities in that we must view them individually and never forget that ideas may only be generalized to a certain degree. Then, we must dig deeper to look for distinguishing factors that inform our judgment as to why a learning difficulty exists. In so doing, we must work together in a preventive, eclectic effort to provide critical interventions of support to meet student needs.

Another result of this study is that there has been considerable growth in teachers’ awareness of ELL academic issues and cultural issues that affect student progress. English Language Learners have traditionally been over-looked and not given considerable consideration as having different learning needs. As the population has grown, the teachers are now realizing the need for cultural understanding and academic strategies as they are being held accountable for all subgroups of students.

### **Implications for Future Instructional Practice**

In the future, in order to meet the growing needs of English Language Learners, teachers and administrators must employ a preventive approach instead of a traditional reactive one. School districts must offer on-going training in order to create teachers who are prepared to meet the needs of ELL students. This includes using resources wisely and creatively in order to find appropriate funding to support training efforts and appropriate human and material resources. Teachers must be trained using specific, research-based strategies that are designed uniquely for students learning English as a Second language. Although general literacy strategies are advantageous, they are simply not enough to meet the complex needs of ELL students.

In an effort to assist teachers of ELL students in understanding the level of risk that an ELL student possesses upon entering school, I developed the following assessment tool for classroom teacher use. Although teachers receive formal testing results from English Proficiency scores and former report cards, those assessments often do not provide teachers with a concise understanding of the multiple factors that place an English Language Learner at risk. Those assessments are often difficult to interpret without consulting an ELL specialist. The following assessment tool provides an immediate indication of how much “at-risk” a particular English Language Learners is so the teacher will know what intensity of interventions to implement.

The individual questions from the assessment tool were developed as a result of my personal experiences working with English Language Learners during the past twelve

years, current research, and the aforementioned conceptual framework that lists multiple factors that could affect the progress of students learning English.

The following assessment tool should be used by classroom teachers when English Language Learners initially enroll in school in order to provide the teacher with a general idea of how “at-risk” the student may be. Since many different factors affect the progress of an English Language Learner, teachers can use this tool to develop a quick understanding of how much and what type of academic intervention the student will need in order to be successful. In other words, if a student scores at a “high-risk”, then the classroom teacher needs to immediately consult with multiple sources (ELL teacher, intervention specialists, parent volunteers, tutors...etc.) to obtain as many interventions as possible for the student.

## Table 1

## ELL Assessment Tool

Developed by Kimberly W. Money, September, 2010

Directions: Teachers please fill out the questionnaire based upon information gathered from the student's cum folder and the parent's comments. Use an interpreter as needed.

1. What is the English Proficiency level of the ELL student according to recent Language Proficiency testing?

Beginning (4)      Intermediate (3)      Advanced (2)      Fluent (1)

2. What is the parents' highest level of completed education?

Elementary (4)      Middle School (3)      High School (2)      College (1)

3. What is the literacy level of the student's parents in native language?

Beginning (3)                      Intermediate (2)                      Advanced (1)

4. What is the ELL student's literacy level in native language?

Beginning (3)                      Intermediate (2)                      Advanced (1)

5. Did the student attend school regularly at their former school in the U.S. or in their native country?

YES (1) NO (2)

6. How did the student perform academically in his/her former school setting?

Poor (4)      Average (3)                      Good (2)              Excellent (1)

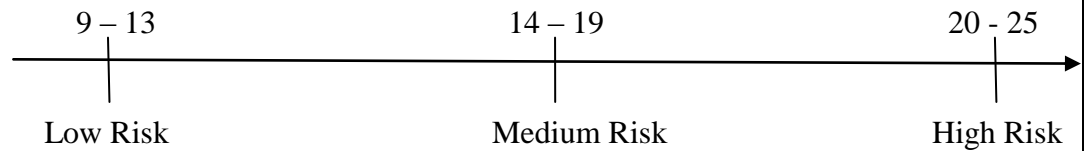
7. What is the primary language spoken by the student? Does it have a written form?

\_\_\_\_\_ (1) Written form? Yes (1) No (2)

8. Has the student experienced interrupted schooling? (Has the student moved frequently to and from home country?)

YES (2) NO (1)

**Directions for Scoring:** Add the numbers beside of the answers circled for the ELL student and use the ranges below to determine whether the ELL student is at a low, medium, or high risk of academic difficulty.



ELL Student: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Assessment: \_\_\_\_\_

Overall Score (Risk): \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher Name: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Implications for Instructional Leadership**

Administrators and teachers must work together to create a positive atmosphere for learning and for engaging in professional dialogue about individual English Language Learners who may or may not possess disabilities. Consulting specialists in the field within the local school, district, and state levels, contribute to an on-going learning community where ELL teachers can consult with regular education and specialized education teachers to create appropriate educational plans for students.

In order to be proactive as educational leaders in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, district administrators must work with principals to encourage the hiring of bilingual personnel. Principals must hire the needed human resources and emphasize to teachers that it is appropriate practice to use students' native language as a tool for learning English as a second language. Specifically, in schools with higher numbers of English Language Learners, additional bilingual staff and interpreters are essential not only to assist teachers and students, but also to assist parents as key participants in their child's education. Parents must be taught how to assist their students at home and how to support their child's education. Educators and administrators must think outside of traditional norms and encourage the use of both first and second languages in the academic setting.

Principals must encourage and provide ELL support to their teachers; therefore, they themselves must be provided increased professional development in the area of meeting the needs of English Language Learners. They need to be able to answer questions such as, "how do you modify instruction for ELL students, and what strategies



are most effective for ELL students?” Superintendents must be intentional with their practice, make enhanced ELL instruction a priority in the district, and provide principals and their schools with necessary human and financial resources to support ELL students. Superintendents and principals also need professional development on Cultural Awareness and Differences, ELL Support Strategies and Sheltered Instruction (Echevarria & Graves, 2007), and the absolute necessity of Newcomer ELL Programs. Newcomer programs are ELL support programs where students remain in a transitional school for six months up to two years until they have learned appropriate survival English. Then, after acquiring basic survival English skills, and having been given appropriate time to acclimate into the new culture, they are then transitioned into their regular home school with daily ELL support. Newcomer and bilingual programs are specifically beneficial for students who suffer from a state of culture shock during their first few months in their new environment. In other words, English Language Learners must be provided differentiated levels of support throughout their stages of language acquisition, instead of a traditional “sink or swim” mentality.

In general, I feel that there will continue to be a growing need for Newcomer Centers and bilingual resources in the future as the population continues to grow and become more diverse. Schools must continually evaluate the manner in which they serve English Language Learners and advocate for appropriate human and material resources that will enable them to instruct according to research-based practices. Additionally, district leaders must make ELL instruction a priority and take appropriate proactive action to ensure student success.

In order to be proactive with training teachers and principals of English Language Learners, universities must also be proactive by increasing coursework opportunities in the area of instructional practices for ELL students and Instructional Leadership to support ELL Students. Coursework should explore not only different cultures and values represented in our schools, but also best practices for English Language Learners and how to create a culturally responsive culture that will support students learning English.

### **Recommendations for Policy Makers**

As the ELL population grows and teachers and administrators are being held accountable for all subgroups of students, this enhanced accountability is a positive step in ensuring that English Language Learners with or without disabilities receive an equal educational opportunity. However, with this higher level of accountability, schools need to receive additional funding to support the training that teachers need in order to meet the needs of this growing population. Traditional ways of teaching do not meet the needs of English Language Learners; therefore, students are not growing at an appropriate level of English proficiency in many school districts across the nation. School districts must be provided with increased funding in order to develop preventive strategies to assist teachers of English Language Learners, instead of reacting sporadically when they find themselves in sanctions under Title I and Title III federal programs.

Additionally, policymakers must align themselves more with current research findings in the area of meeting the needs of students learning English. On one hand, NCLB has required that school districts employ “research-based practices,” which is a strong step in the right direction, but then policies exist that require ELL students to take

state-mandated standardized tests within 12-24 months of arriving in the United States. Research clearly states that it takes English Language Learners much longer than 24 months to acquire the academic vocabulary needed to pass standardized testing. In Jose's case specifically, upon reentry into the U.S. he was required to test on the state EOG (End of Grade test) exam at the end of his first year back into the country because his 24 months had expired and could not be reissued. These type of policies, although created in an effort to hold all students equally accountable, in reality are setting students up for failure. Policies need to reflect current research when creating appropriate timelines, while continuing to require research-based practices, and therefore should provide a more authentic, alternate means of assessment.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

I certainly feel like more research of this type needs to be done in the area of English Language Learners and students with disabilities. Students must not be over identified or under identified for specialized education programs, and the primary way to avoid these misidentifications is through educating teachers and administrators about second language acquisition and differences between a language barrier and a disability.

As an ESL teacher I have always been taught and cautioned not to refer English Language Learners to specialized education programs unless absolutely necessary because historically English Language Learners have been over identified as being students with disabilities. Although I understand this notion, this study has made me view this idea differently because there are cases where discrepancies and deficiencies are so distinct that English Language Learners need to receive the assistance of a special

education teacher in order to assist with a true disability. Teachers and administrators must be taught through training and dialogue with one another when to refer and not refer an English Language Learner for specialized education. This study has renewed my sense of advocacy for students who are English Language Learners and are widely underrepresented in public school systems across our state and nation. This research has strengthened my own personal research interest of effective ELL instruction and how to best meet the needs English Language Learners with disabilities.

Limitations of this study include whether or not students from different language and cultural groups suffer from more anxiety and stress than others when acculturating to a new educational environment. In addition, do older students who are learning English as a Second Language suffer more from anxiety related to transition and culture shock than do younger students? Since Federal regulations require students learning English to take standardized high stakes tests after twenty four months of being in U.S. schools, how does testing affect the anxiety and stress of English Language Learners? To adequately answer these questions, on-going research need to be done concerning the multiple factors that affects the acquisition of learning English as a Second Language in today's public schools.

Other limitations of the study consist of not knowing exactly how much of the students' struggles were due to language difference or disabilities? Based upon the data, one can only speculate which factor is more directly responsible for the delays in student achievement. Although knowing this information informs research and practice, the findings still show that it is most significant that teachers know when and how to

intervene when a student learning English as a Second Language struggles and how to accommodate instruction for a language difference or learning disability.

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